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A STUDY OF THREE CONTEMPORARY WESTERN
NORTH CAROLINA STORYTELLERS

A Thesis
by
DANIELLE ERIN RECTOR

Submitted to the Graduate School
Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

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December 2009
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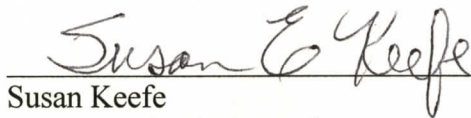
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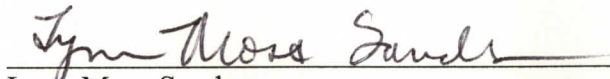
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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THREE CONTEMPORARY WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA STORYTELLERS (December 2009)

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In past generations, stories were passed on orally within the traditional storytelling family or local community setting. Today, there are a wide array of storytelling festivals and workshops held, at which traditional and revivalist tellers share their craft with a broader, more mainstream audience. As a result, traditional stories are being shared with a wider audience, who may or may not truly understand the historical and moral importance of these tales and their messages. In order to study this shift from the family context to larger audience context, I have selected and interviewed three contemporary western North Carolina storytellers.

The three storytellers selected for this project are Orville Hicks, white male Appalachian mountain storyteller; Lloyd Arneach, native Cherokee male teller; and Connie Regan-Blake, white female revivalist teller. Hicks and Arneach both learned their respective traditional tales as children from family members—from two uncles in the case of Arneach, and from a number of family members for Hicks. Regan-Blake, a native of Alabama, moved to the region in the early 1970s, and began learning stories from famed Beech Mountain

teller Ray Hicks and sharing tales at local public library events. The fact that Regan-Blake is not a native of the Appalachian region, yet learned her mountain tales from a traditional teller, makes her a revivalist storyteller.

All three of the storytellers studied in this project are helping to continue the traditional art of storytelling within each of their respective cultures. The fact that all three of these tellers have been willing to expand their storytelling audience to include people from outside their native culture demonstrates their commitment to storytelling. Even if traditional storytelling does not continue in the traditional context of home and family in the coming generations, storytelling ambassadors like Hicks, Arneach, and Regan-Blake will ensure that traditional stories are shared with more mainstream audiences and thus the stories will live on in their traditional oral form.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Story of My Thesis

Storytelling is simultaneously as old as mankind and as new as this morning's news headlines. The stories that continue to be told today in the Appalachian region have been told for many generations, yet skilled storytellers add fresh details to the tales in order to keep them interesting for modern audiences in many different performance contexts. Moreover, tellers have begun telling in interesting new performance contexts over the past several decades that have been made possible by the storytelling revival. Scholars have studied traditional Appalachian storytellers performing in the traditional contexts of family and close community, as well as revivalist storytellers who tell stories in front of larger audiences. However, there exists today a hybrid set of storytellers deserving of study: traditional storytellers today who have ventured out telling their tales in front of larger, nontraditional audiences. This unique circumstance is intriguing and worthy of study in order to better understand the present situation and future of the folkloric act of mountain storytelling. Even in the context of the modern world as it exists with the aftereffects of the storytelling revival, traditional storytellers continue to be active in their telling and listening to their native stories within storytelling cultures, such as those that exist in the Appalachian mountains in western North Carolina.

I started thinking about this master's thesis project early in the spring semester of 2009. I was enrolled in a qualitative research methods course with Dr. Susan Keefe at Appalachian State University, as a part of my course requirements for my M.A. in Appalachian Studies. While talking with Dr. Keefe about my major project for that course, we discussed my personal interest in storytelling, specifically the telling of ghost stories. I decided to interview eight storytellers for this project, eventually deciding on the basis of my project being the shift of storytelling audiences from the traditional family setting into larger festival settings of today. While my original interest of ghost stories did not work out in terms of research material, I ended up with a much more interesting topic that would eventually meld into this thesis.

Two of the storytellers that I interviewed in Dr. Keefe's course, Lloyd Arneach and Connie Regan-Blake, had particularly interesting stories about how they were introduced to storytelling—as a child in the case of Arneach, as a young adult in the case of Regan-Blake—and the ways in which they share their stories today. As a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokees in Cherokee, North Carolina, Arneach is a part of one of the oldest storytelling traditions in the eastern United States, and the ways in which he continues this tradition today interested me. Conversely, Regan-Blake did not grow up in a traditional storytelling culture, but rather came into storytelling as a profession after graduating from college. She was a key player in the early days of the storytelling revival and of the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of

Storytelling, the organization responsible for the advent of the National Storytelling Festival held annually since 1973 in Jonesborough, Tennessee.

Also in the spring semester of 2009, I was enrolled in the Appalachian Studies Colloquium course, the capstone course for the M.A. degree, that was being co-taught by Thomas McGowan, Professor of English, and Orville Hicks, Jack Tale teller from nearby Matney, North Carolina. Throughout the course, Orville told a number of Jack Tales, as well as short jokes and lots of background information about himself, his family, and the tales. The class audio-recorded and transcribed all of this material so it could be used in the future by both class members and other scholars for projects. In fact, the *Appalachian Journal* will be publishing the article entitled “‘Waaaaay Back Up in the Mountains’: An Interview with Orville Hicks” that was written from these transcribed class meetings. As I got to thinking about these three storytellers, Arneach, Regan-Blake, and Hicks, I began to draw interesting similarities and differences among them. For example, even though Regan-Blake grew up in Alabama in a non-storytelling culture, she developed a deep friendship with famed Jack Tale teller Ray Hicks over the course of several decades due to their involvement in the National Storytelling Festival. Ray Hicks was one of Orville Hicks’s greatest family storytelling mentors, and thus an interesting parallel between Orville Hicks and Connie Regan-Blake was drawn that I immediately wished to explore further.

By the time I decided that I would write a thesis in completion of my M.A. degree around March 2009, I had amassed a large amount of information about Appalachian storytellers. I was intrigued by the patterns I was starting to notice

about the shifts that were happening in terms of the tellers' performance contexts, from the more intimate family setting in which storytelling had traditionally been preserved, to the larger festival contexts that were sustaining many tellers today, as well as bringing awareness about the art to the mainstream American public. In talking with Thomas McGowan, who would later become my thesis chairperson, I realized that the shift in performance context was an area of scholarship that had yet to be thoroughly studied, and thus would be a viable topic for my thesis. I decided to focus on these three specific storytellers for my project because they each have a unique perspective on storytelling—both in the traditional sense for Arneach and Hicks and due to the impacts of the storytelling revival for all three tellers. The three different perspectives gained by interviewing and observing the performances of these three individuals will give a deeper, more comprehensive understanding to the issue of audience shift in storytelling in the contemporary world.

Traditional and Revivalist Storytellers

One of the themes of this project has become analyzing the differences and similarities between revivalist and traditional storytellers, and how these different storytellers operate within contemporary performance contexts. The defining difference between traditional and revivalist tellers is that traditional tellers grew up in a native storytelling cultures and learned the stories at a young age in a more unconscious manner, while revivalist tellers grew up in an outside culture and became interested in storytelling in a much more conscious way at a

later age. Barbara Duncan writes, "it is the process of learning stories in a traditional setting, from family and community, that makes a storyteller 'traditional'" (21). Two of the tellers I included for study in this project, Arneach and Hicks, are traditional tellers in every sense of the word, both having learned their stories from family members while growing up in traditional storytelling cultures in the mountains of western North Carolina. Regan-Blake, on the other hand, grew up in Alabama and was not a member of a traditional storytelling culture at a young age. She did not become a storyteller until she was a young adult, and at that time, it was in a professional capacity. In this way, Regan-Blake is a revivalist storyteller.

Another difference that has been ascribed to differentiate revivalist storytellers from traditional storytellers is that revivalist tellers add material from many different cultures outside their own to their repertoires. Because revivalist storytellers are often not physically exposed to the traditional tellers from whom they gather their tales, revivalist tellers often have to rely more heavily on print materials. Traditional storytellers, of course, almost always rely solely on oral sources for adding material to their repertoire. Barbara Duncan writes about the importance of learning stories in the traditional manner of face-to-face oral transmission:

In these situations, much information beyond just the story is imparted, including the values of the culture, its aesthetic, and its style of telling—timing, emphasis, inflection. None of these can

be learned, by even the most skilled nontraditional storyteller, from reading a story in a book. (22)

Also, traditional tellers usually do not change the details of their inherited stories too much, if at all. Ruth Stotter and William McCarthy have written that "in a traditional culture certain conservative restraints on the storyteller's freedom are operative" (165). Revivalist storytellers are more flexible in their adaptations of traditional stories for modern audiences, and often make changes to many details or even more meaningful parts of the plot. For nontraditional tellers, "artistry is innovative and dynamic, and for revivalist storytellers the entertaining story is the thing" (Stotter and McCarthy 165). This flexibility on the part of revivalist tellers could be due in part to the fact that they do not feel a native connection to the material. Furthermore, the task of the professional revivalist storyteller is to entertain audiences, and the changes they make to the stories allow them to better entertain.

Traditional storytellers begin performing their tales in front of the very same people from whom they learned their tales: their family. If they choose to do so at a later date after their confidence grows, traditional tellers will move into performing for larger and larger audiences. The revivalist storyteller becomes a storyteller in the first place in order to perform for public audiences, so these are the first places he or she would begin telling. However, most revivalist storytellers also begin telling at smaller venues, such as schools and libraries, before gaining the confidence and renown to perform for festival audiences. Finally, revivalist storytellers usually employ a more stylized manner of

performance at their storytelling events. They often use large gestures, sometimes props, and often a fixed wardrobe that is related to their stories or presentation of self. These well-rehearsed and planned additions to performance point to the fact that the revivalist storyteller is first and foremost an entertainer. The charm of the traditional storyteller, on the other hand, is the more natural and relaxed nature of his or her performances. This casualness harkens back to the fact that traditional storytellers learned their stories in everyday situations of traditional culture that incorporate storytelling as a natural part of life.

Because revivalist storytellers did not learn their stories from their families or local communities, listeners may be worried that they do not accurately or fairly portray the traditional cultures that they are representing through the sharing of the stories. Because they are not natives from the traditional culture, revivalist storytellers have a responsibility to the Appalachian culture to represent its culture in a way that works to break down stereotypes about the region. Stotter and McCarthy write, "We would like to hope that these nontraditional storytellers play a vital role in maintaining the integrity as well as the popularity of these traditional tales" (167). The revivalist storyteller included in this study, Connie Regan-Blake, consciously takes steps to represent the Appalachian region in a positive light when she performs outside the region. She says that she "never had any negative stereotypes about people from Appalachia" (Interview 9/16/09). Regan-Blake says, "So if I happen to be the first person someone's met from the South, I'm hoping I'm going to be helping work against any stereotypes they might have" (Interview 9/16/09). In this way, Regan-Blake is fully aware of the

hesitations some people might have about outsiders telling traditional stories, and she tries to help combat such problems rather than exacerbate the problem.

Regan-Blake is a revivalist storyteller who loves tradition in the best sense of the word, and she does not claim to be from a traditional background, yet represents the traditional stories she tells in positive, productive ways.

Margaret MacDonald has some interesting thoughts that relate specifically to the two traditional storytellers in this study and how they consult both written and oral sources in order to add to their repertoires:

The term “traditional storyteller” usually refers to tellers whose repertoires were passed down from others and who share their tales within their own communities. When a teller begins to share their tales beyond the close community, when a teller begins to add to her or his repertoire from books or other traditions, when a teller becomes a part of today’s revivalist storytelling movement, can this teller still be considered “traditional”? (199)

While Arneach did learn his stories from his uncles within his native community, he has chosen to widely share the stories with the mainstream culture. Also, Arneach includes in his repertoire stories from other native cultures. In his book *Long-Ago Stories of the Eastern Cherokee* he includes two stories that are non-Cherokee, but are from other Native American tribes: the story of Wounded Knee and the story of Ishi, the last of the Yahi people. This is an example of how “as traditional tellers encounter other storytelling traditions, they discover tales they want to add to their repertoire” (MacDonald 201). The very fact that Arneach has

published books and audio recordings of his stories shows that he is a part of the “revivalist storytelling movement,” the very phenomenon that has allowed the various performance contexts of today to flourish. Hicks has also published two books and a CD recording that include both information about his life and the stories themselves. By publishing in such modern media, traditional tellers bridge the gap from oral to written contexts. Publication of traditional material allows it to reach a much wider audience than by oral performance alone, though much of the traditional context and style is lost in the written form.

The differences and distinctions between traditional and revivalist tellers in the modern age are not so clear-cut based on the findings of this project. For example, Arneach has published two books of his stories and Hicks has collaborated with Julia Ebel on two books about his life and stories. On the other hand, revivalist teller Regan-Blake does not have a whole book published of her stories. One might expect less traditional tellers to be more likely to have their stories shared in a less traditional context, yet Hicks and Arneach seem to defy convention in this way. Another way in which people have tried to differentiate between traditional and revivalist tellers is by saying that revivalists are more apt to make changes to the stories that they include as a part of their repertoire and tell. However, this difference does not hold true because it has been well-documented that even strictly traditional storytellers have been making small changes, additions, and omissions to their stories for generations. The well-known storytelling tradition that exists on Beech Mountain, North Carolina is

sustained by traditional tellers who “each...added a signature twist to the tale” (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 67).

Margaret MacDonald has written that “perhaps the most important thing to consider when dealing with tradition is that it is always changing” (205). While “traditional” storytellers may be romanticized as the bearers and preservers of age-old traditions that are somehow frozen in time, the reality of the matter is that traditions are always changing and evolving in accordance with the needs of the people who practice them. The stories that storytellers tell have been constantly changing throughout history as tellers have altered them based on the audience, ease of memorization, and other factors. Therefore, people should not be so quick to criticize contemporary storytellers who are somewhat altering stories to better suit their repertoire or style needs, as this has occurred throughout history and the stories are still being told. These new contexts of storytelling festivals and large-scale events will not irrevocably “damage” the traditional stories, but rather just be another step in the continuous process of evolution. This process is explained in the following passage:

When [Hawaiian storyteller] Makia Malo turns to a book for a Hawaiian folktale and then reshapes it into a present-day pidgin story, he has not “lost” his culture—he has simply brought it alive for today’s audiences. At no time in history has “tradition” ever been pinned to the table like a bug, never to change. The nature of tradition is change. We need to understand that tradition is not

“the past.” Tradition is the past on the way to the future.

(MacDonald 205)

In order to stand the test of time, traditions must always been changing and adapting, and storytellers must make such changes in their stories.

Stotter and McCarthy write that “a traditional tale in a professional teller’s repertoire, whether or not that teller shares the cultural or geographic roots of the story, undergoes a metamorphosis analogous to that it undergoes within its own geographic/cultural area” (165-66). In other words, whether or not that traditional teller stays in his or her home community or takes his traditional stories on the road, the tales will undergo some sort of shift in his lifetime. For example, “plot, characters, and motivation remain consistent, while performance style, embellishments, and performer-audience interactions vary with the individual artist” (Stotter and McCarthy 166). Each teller will keep the basic elements in the story constant, while adding or changing smaller details that make the story unique to them as a teller, yet do not change the underlying plot. Revivalist tellers also adopt some of these same traditional tales into their repertoire and make changes according to their own style and typical audience. On such occasions, “even when the revivalist tellers add embellishments that are idiosyncratic or hokey, the tales remain, at the core, Jack Tales, preserving the essence of the Jack archetype” (Stotter and McCarthy 166).

The Storytelling Revival and New Contexts

The basic premise of this project is that the new performance contexts in which storytellers of today are able to operate have been made possible largely due to the storytelling revival of the 1970s and 1980s in the United States, based around the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee. Already in 1903, however, a gathering of University of Tennessee teachers heralded "the first storytelling revival movement of the twentieth century [with] the founding of the National Story Tellers' League in Knoxville, Tennessee" (Sobol, "Renaissance" 1268). The leaders of the first wave of the storytelling revival saw the purpose of the movement to be the following: "bringing 'classics' of orally derived literature...to the children of Appalachia and the immigrant inner cities" (Sobol, "Renaissance" 1269). These "classic" stories included stories from Homer, Anglo-Saxon epics, and Norse sagas, as well as those tales collected in the nineteenth century by the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, and Joel Chandler Harris.

Although his ballad and song collecting did not occur until the mid-twentieth century, the folk song and story collection of Richard Chase promoted public interest in storytelling. A native of Alabama, Chase embarked on a seven-year collecting project "principally in the Beech Mountain area of Watauga County, North Carolina, and in so doing established Jack as one of the best-rounded characters in the annals of folk literature" (Oxford 48). Joseph Sobol writes about the public fascination with Appalachian oral tradition during this time period:

The realization that the supposedly savage backwoods of Appalachia contained flourishing oral traditions that could be validated by Oxford and Harvard scholars began to deepen the mystique of the region as a neo-Elizabethan cultural preserve. ("Renaissance" 1269)

Americans from outside of Appalachia, as well as some European scholars, became interested in the bastion of European folklore that was alive and well in the southern Appalachian mountains in the twentieth century. One of the most popularized tale types that were collected and shared by early collectors were the Jack Tales. This popularization of the folk character Jack would come full circle with the establishment of the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee, in which a direct descendant of some of Chase's original informants would bring the stories to a wider public context. Even though Chase craved the title of bearer of Jack Tales to the wider world, Ray Hicks became the patriarch of the National Storytelling Festival with his popular annual performance of Jack Tales.

Joseph Sobol writes: "In 1973 Jimmy Neil Smith, a local entrepreneur in Jonesborough, Tennessee, initiated a storytelling festival in his hometown, naming it the National Storytelling Festival" ("Renaissance" 1268). This storytelling festival was the first festival to be established in the nation that was solely devoted to storytellers and their craft. Storytelling groups and festivals "began to emerge, both for the direct pleasure they gave their devotees and for the artistic camouflage they provided for people to continue the struggles of the

previous decade in gentler, less confrontational forms" (Sobol, "Renaissance" 1269). Many of the same people who were a part of the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s began to express themselves creatively through storytelling in the revival that took off during the 1970s. Like the folk music and crafts festivals in which many storytellers got their start in the festival circuit, "the use of Appalachian themes and images as key source material" was also important in the newly-established storytelling festivals (Sobol, "Renaissance" 1268). In this way, storytelling festivals hired traditional storytellers such as Ray Hicks in order to give the events an authentic mountain feel. Also, the National Festival "draws on the rural, antiquarian mystique of its Appalachian site for important elements of its allure, even as the movement itself has grown increasingly pluralistic and professional" (Sobol, "Renaissance" 1270). The geographical site of Jonesborough, Tennessee, in the Appalachian mountains has grounded it in the traditional storytelling culture that it has attempted to replicate on a grander scale in the storytelling festival. Truly, "storytellers from around the country have eagerly embraced the town as an emblem of the transfigured communal past that the revival movement would have had to invent, had it not been offered up whole in east Tennessee" (Sobol, "Renaissance" 1270). Jonesborough's location, along with the traditional artists that have been invited to perform at the festival over the years, had led to its recognition as a festival to which people can come to see authentic Appalachian storytelling.

In this way, the storytelling revival—spearheaded by collectors and performers such as Chase, but brought to full fruit by the National Association for

the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS) and the National Storytelling Festival—created new performance contexts for both traditional and revivalist artists in which they could share their stories. As Kay Stone has written, “quite simply, active narrators cannot survive without good listeners, and when their audiences change they must respond without losing rich heritage upon which they depend. It may even be necessary to seek out new audiences in unfamiliar contexts” (168). Storytelling does not happen today in traditional contexts as much as it did in years past, so those interested in keeping the stories alive must bring the stories to new audiences. Skilled storytellers living in the modern age have often found it necessary to begin sharing with a broader-base audience than they normally would within their traditional family context.

Furthermore, there seems to be a cyclical nature that is inherent to the Appalachian tradition of storytelling that storytellers point to as a sign that the stories are not in danger of dying out, but rather in a natural process of growth and decline, growth and decline. Despite her belief that people should be making conscious effort to preserve the stories that are in the region today, Regan-Blake has the following view about the art: “I think that there will always be storytelling. You know, I think it might continue going in cycles like it did in the ’50s and ’60s, people kind of turned to television instead” (Interview 3/24/09). Storytelling festivals are growing—and have been growing since their establishment in the early 1970s—which seems to be evidence of a steady interest in storytelling, despite pressures from the modern world and perhaps more up-to-date forms of entertainment. The storytellers interviewed concur that their

beloved craft will continue to be shared in the coming generations, even if it consists of mostly personal experience narratives within the family and traditional tales at storytelling festivals.

The Special Role of Ray Hicks

One interesting connection that exists between two of the storytellers included in this project is Ray Hicks, famed Jack Tale teller from western Watauga County, North Carolina. Ray Hicks is a member of the Hicks-Harmon family Jack Tale tradition in western North Carolina. Cheryl Oxford writes that “the young Ray learned most of his Jack Tales repertoire from his father, Nathan, and his paternal grandfather, Benjamin Hicks” (50). Unlike most of his family members, Ray picked up the stories as a youngster and took an interest in passing them on to future generations in his family, and eventually, to those outside his community: “Like Jesus, Hicks saw himself as marked for a special calling—that of storyteller, a living link with ancient lore” (Oxford 51). As an adult, Ray Hicks decided to share his traditional stories with a wider audience and was invited to the first National Storytelling Festival at Jonesborough, Tennessee, in 1973. William Lightfoot writes that Ray left his mountain home “only once a year to appear at the annual storytelling festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee” (4). Hicks performed at all but one of the National Festivals during his remaining years, missing one year due to illness. Joseph Sobol writes that the organizers of the National Storytelling Festival

may not have consciously wished to leave their traditional roots behind, but those tellers who could not get up on stage and boogie with the big boys and girls were going to have to stay on the Swappin' Grounds. Hicks was one certifiable traditional storyteller who had that mysterious something extra: star quality.

(Journey 111)

A wholly traditional performer, Hicks's presence each year at Jonesborough served as an important link from the past generations of storytellers to the present and future generations of revivalist tellers.

Hicks's performances were deeply loved by all those in attendance at Jonesborough each year, and his style of performance was very individualistic. Cheryl Oxford writes, "although Ray Hicks learned his Jack Tales repertoire primarily by word-of-mouth transmission from family elders, he has impressed these handed-down tales with his own storytelling style" (48). In this way, it can be seen that even traditional tellers make innovations to the tales that they have learned from their traditional culture. Such changes do not ruin the stories, but rather add new vibrancy to them that sustains them into the coming generations. Another characteristic of Ray's style of storytelling is his "sense of history, a communal memory of the past, that should serve as a reminder to the present" (Oxford 50). He "believes that his stories embody the collective unconscious of a kindred people's yesteryears" (Oxford 50). Cheryl Oxford continues to remark on this sense of history that was so integral to Hicks's storytelling events:

This running commentary, or gloss, harmonic to the tale proper, is a stylistic feature of Hicks' storytelling. Through such introspective, authorial asides, "the mind of the creator" is gradually revealed, and patient listening gives an ethnographer insight into such a mind. (49)

By employing this technique of sharing personal information throughout his telling of his traditional stories, "Ray Hicks' storytelling conveys aspects of his autobiography" (Oxford 48). In this way, "listeners discover as much about the narrator as they do about his narrative creations" (Oxford 48).

Connections with Ray Hicks

Ray is uncle to Orville Hicks, and one of Orville's two major family sources of Jack Tales. In addition to being mentee to Ray in the family storytelling tradition, Orville also had a very fond personal relationship with his uncle. Regan-Blake also had a connection with Ray in that he was a featured teller every year at the National Storytelling Festival since its inception in 1973. Hicks's regular appearances in Jonesborough suggested "that whatever transformations were inflating the event...at the very least there would always be Ray Hicks, the 'Old Man of the Mountains,' to represent a fountainhead of pure storytelling tradition" (Sobol, *Journey* 112). Regan-Blake introduced Ray's performances in all but one year that he performed at Jonesborough. Beyond that, Regan-Blake made many trips to the home of Ray and his wife Rosa in order to learn some of Ray's traditional Jack Tales. It is noteworthy that Orville came to

learn Ray's stories due to being immersed in the traditional family context, while Regan-Blake learned stories from Ray only after she became involved in the storytelling revival movement. Ray became a living symbol for the National Storytelling Festival, giving the new movement grounding in Ray's traditional background as a mountain storyteller. Young people like Regan-Blake who had taken a new interest in storytelling sought out established and recognized tellers in order to learn the tales in the traditional manner of face-to-face oral transmission. Even though Regan-Blake did not grow up in a storytelling tradition, she learned much about this deep-rooted tradition through her interactions and experiences with her mentor Ray Hicks.

During his lifetime, Ray Hicks expressed concern that contemporary forms of entertainment were threatening the traditional mountain tales. In the 1974 Appalshop film *Fixin' to Tell About Jack*, Hicks talks about how when television first came into homes people were very interested in this new form of entertainment, though this novelty quickly faded. The Jack Tales and other form of oral narratives are more long-lasting and have held the attention of people for hundreds of years, and thus will surely outlast any new forms of entertainment that seem to threaten its perpetuation, Hicks implies. Hicks also talks about how he worries because many people in his area and family can tell a little bit of a Jack Tale, but do not know the whole tales as he does (*Fixin' to Tell About Jack*.) Finally, Hicks says that he hopes that his one of his children or at least someone in the area will continue to share that Jack Tales that he loves and has shared his whole life (*Fixin' to Tell About Jack*). In his mentoring of both his relation

Orville Hicks and revivalist storyteller Connie Regan-Blake, Ray Hicks ensured that his beloved stories were carried on into subsequent generations.

Tellers and Sources

Each of the three storytellers in this project—both traditional and revivalist—consult both written and oral sources for their learning of tales to add to their repertoires. Some people might be surprised that traditional tellers consult written sources in addition to the traditional oral sources, but this has been occurring for generations. Arneach, like other contemporary Cherokee storytellers, has consulted the early twentieth-century James Mooney work *Myths of the Cherokee* in order to compare oral versions of traditional Cherokee stories he has heard. Carl Lindahl writes: “Most contemporary narratives known as Jack Tales, and most of their tellers, owe much to Chase’s 1943 collection, *The Jack Tales*” (“Jacks” xvii). Chase “cleaned up” many of the details of the traditional mountain stories, and these changes are echoed in some versions that traditional tellers share in the public school setting today. Regan-Blake began her storytelling career by consulting written texts of children’s stories that were housed in the Chattanooga Public Library. It was only after she became active in the storytelling community that she was able to meet with other tellers face-to-face in order to gather stories orally.

In this study, the changing contexts of the storytellers’ performances and the changes in the stories themselves in these various contexts will be analyzed both by looking at multiple performances by each of these storytellers in different

contexts, but more importantly from personal interviews with the tellers themselves. This style of ethnic criticism in which the storytellers talk about their storytelling and stories themselves contributes to the scholarship on Appalachian storytelling. The three storytellers' special insights into their craft and roles as storyteller have made this study as strong as it has become, due to the fact that the storytellers themselves have been able to talk about what they do when they tell stories. Scholar Alan Dundes calls this type of insider insight into folkloric topics "ethnic literary criticism," in that the bearers of the tradition themselves are given a voice to share what is most important about their tradition and the ways in which they interpret its significance (30). This study seeks to add important ethnic literary criticism to the area of contemporary Appalachian storytellers.

Chapter 2

Lloyd Arneach: Traditional Cherokee Storyteller

Arneach and Extended Contexts

Though the traditional setting for Cherokee stories was within the native culture, today there are many tellers who have taken the art outside of their own culture and adapted the stories for sharing in the mainstream American culture. Lloyd Arneach is one of these talented tellers; he learned his craft in the traditional manner of face-to-face transmission from family members and community and now has been sharing with the general public for nearly twenty years. Arneach is a skilled storyteller who adapts to various contemporary performance contexts with great dexterity. Folklorist Joseph Sobol has written that "what sets the storyteller apart are the qualities of relationship and immediacy. The archetypal image of the storyteller is one of relationship, teller-to-listener and teller-to-tribe" (*Journey* 33). This quality of relationship is what allows native tellers like Arneach to cross the boundary from the traditional context to mainstream audience contexts. Arneach creates a storytelling environment in which the audience feels immediately connected to both him and the Native American culture which he so proudly represents. Sobol's "archetypal image of the storyteller" is still alive and well in the Cherokee culture, and Arneach extends it even further into the new contexts that are established at modern storytelling festivals and other large venues.

Arneach himself notes this pattern of storytelling festivals and other large-scale performance contexts on his website:

[He] has told stories at the Kennedy Center, National Folklife Festival (Washington, DC), the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian (Washington, DC), the Winnepeg International Storytelling Festival (Canada), festivals, schools, universities, Pow-Wows, theaters, and other venues throughout the United States. ("Biography")

As a gifted storyteller, Arneach is able to make the audience feel connected to and engaged with him as a teller in both large, formal contexts, such as at the Kennedy Center, and at intimate family gatherings in his native community.

According to Melissa Heckler, "today education and entertainment are the two primary needs platform storytellers are called upon to fill" (30). In all contexts in which Arneach performs, he both educates and entertains. The fact that he is able to do both of these things at all venues shows his dexterity as a teller. Joseph Bruchac has written that "storytelling seems to have always served at least two purposes among Native people—to entertain and to instruct" (94). Arneach has performed at a variety of locations during his decades as a public storyteller.

However, the two main occasions for which Arneach now performs are for school groups and for entertainment, such as at cultural festivals. Because Arneach employs an entertaining storytelling style, as well as the fact that he always includes information about Cherokee culture in his presentations, his performances are always both educational *and* entertaining. By serving both

needs in every context, he is ensuring that audiences remain interested in both the stories themselves and what he has to share about his native culture.

Arneach's Repertory and Contexts

Scholar Robert J. Adams “notes the importance of developing a repertoire broad enough to meet the demands of varying storytelling situations” (MacDonald 194). Arneach has such a large repertory that he does not feel compelled to plan which specific stories he is going to tell before arriving at any given performance venue. Only after seeing the audience and getting a feel for what type of stories he thinks they would most enjoy, does he decide what specific stories he is going to tell. This practice shows Arneach’s high level of comfort with various performance contexts and his ability to work successfully within those contexts.

Arneach skillfully changes some details of the stories in order to make them relatable for different groups of people, while always keeping the morals and lessons of the stories true to their traditional Cherokee roots. One way in which Arneach makes the stories more relatable for younger generations is by adding more contemporary details to his stories, such as personal electronics and energy drinks. In this way, he is continuing the tradition of storytelling within his native culture—and also with a broader audience—yet ensuring that these stories continue to sustain the interest of the kids and teenagers of today. Cultural change is inevitable, Arneach realizes, and therefore some details of the traditional stories must be altered somewhat in order to keep up with the trends of today. It is unfortunate that these stories must be changed at all, but Arneach

realizes that young people must be able to relate to the stories so that they take an interest in them, and hopefully pass them on in the future. One of Arneach's major missions as a Cherokee storyteller is to preserve his native culture through sharing of the tales with a broader audience, who he hopes will embrace and respect the stories for what they have meant to Cherokee culture for countless generations, as well as what they hold to be true for all of humanity.

Barbara Duncan points out the special role of short conversational narrative genres in Cherokee culture:

In traditional Cherokee culture, as in other cultures with living traditions of storytelling, stories are often sprinkled throughout conversation, embedded in the flow of events and casual talk.

They make a point or teach a lesson relevant to the events or the conversation in progress. (15)

Perhaps this is a more common way of relaying stories to the younger generations of Cherokees—especially today—as most children and teenagers are tending to shy away from the more “formal” traditional art of storytelling. Due to this, skilled storytellers like Arneach may add more contemporary elements to their traditional tales that help kids relate to the tales being told, and thus be open to listening to the lessons offered therein. At large storytelling festivals like the National Festival in Jonesborough, traditional “old stories hold up surprisingly well, but some tellers update them for modern audiences” (Watson 62). The audience at Jonesborough consists of mostly adults, so this shows that storytellers also adapt tales for performances for adult audiences. Today's listeners of all

ages seem to be receptive to these more traditional stories, but some tellers add contemporary details to make them even more relatable and seemingly relevant to moderns' lives. Arneach's acute attention to the needs of any specific audience make him able to adapt his storytelling style in any storytelling context in which he finds himself.

The skilled storyteller employs various techniques that differ from context to context: "Varying with community preference and the narrator's personal style, these can involve such nonverbal and quasi-verbal support of the verbal message as gestures, facial expressions, and imitation of sounds and characters' voices" (Burrison 1186). Arneach explains how he uses different-sized hand motions depending on the age of his audience: "the younger the kids are, the larger the motions. I do what I say 'outside the shoulder' and 'inside the shoulder'" (Interview). Smaller children react better to more dramatic hand and arm motions during the telling of a story, and their attention is easier kept with larger motions. This is one specific example of how Arneach has adapted his storytelling techniques to the mainstream stage—from the more traditional setting in which he learned his tales to non-traditional performances at schools, libraries, and festivals today.

Arneach's Background and New Contexts

Though born and raised on the Cherokee Reservation in western North Carolina, Arneach has more outside world experience than perhaps many native Cherokee people. He left the reservation for a number of his adult years, working

as a computer programmer for AT&T in Atlanta. Edwina Roland has written the most developed scholarly piece on Arneach in John Burrison's edited collection *Storytellers: Folktales and Legends from the South*. Roland explains how she first came in contact with Arneach: "A librarian friend in my home town of Kennesaw, Georgia...had heard about Lloyd Arneach—his folktales and Indian background—from several of the neighborhood children. She referred me to him as a fellow folklore enthusiast" (83-84). While living in the Atlanta area and working for AT&T, Arneach began sharing his tales with many non-Native friends and neighbors, who soon spread the word about the entertaining and informative tales that Arneach shared with them. It was in this non-traditional context of a suburban Atlanta neighborhood that Arneach began telling his traditional Cherokee tales for a broader audience. Margaret MacDonald speaks to this phenomenon: "We expect a traditional teller to reside within his own cultural home. Yet in today's world, people travel widely and often spend their lives far from their own cultural roots" (203). Even though Arneach was living far away from his "cultural home" of the Cherokee Reservation in western North Carolina, he was still a traditional storyteller who happened to be sharing his tales in a much less traditional context.

Richard Bauman writes that "the life history of an individual and the structure and evolution of an individual's repertoire represent important contextual frameworks for understanding the place of folklore in human life" (365). For Arneach, it is significant that he began sharing his native stories publicly while living in Atlanta in a mostly non-Native environment. This is a

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significant detail of his personal history that affects how he preserves and shares his cultural history in a broader context. The fact that people in his suburban Atlanta neighborhood were interested in the tales from a culture different from their own demonstrates the universality of storytelling and the lessons contained therein.

While living in the Atlanta area, Arneach shared his native culture with a Euro-American audience by lecturing "on Cherokee culture to scout groups and civic organizations" (Roland 84). Those present at such lectures were people who would not have otherwise heard the Cherokee stories and learned about Cherokee culture in such a traditionally oral fashion, yet Arneach enjoyed sharing this information with them because he understands the universal human truths and moral lessons to be gleaned from Cherokee stories. Roland goes on to write that "the stories [Arneach told at such venues] were learned in his youth from elders on the Cherokee Boundary, particularly his uncle, George Owl" (84). Arneach is able to take the stories out of their traditional context in which he originally learned them to make them applicable and enjoyable for others outside of the Cherokee culture.

As seen in the case of Arneach beginning to tell publicly while living in Atlanta, the folklore of ethnic groups "develops in the new environment, taking new forms and receiving new emphases that make it different" (Paredes 71). This "new environment" is often new contexts in which performance occurs. In the case of Arneach and other Native American storytellers, these contexts often include audience members who are non-Native and therefore are not familiar with

many aspects of his culture to which the stories refer. Because of this, storytellers must make some adaptations within the stories, or at least add an explanatory piece to their storytelling repertoire which helps Euro-American audiences better understand and connect with the stories being told. Margaret MacDonald completed extensive research and published a book on ten traditional storytellers from around the world. Her conclusions about the preservation of the art and how tellers adapt to new contexts had many similarities to those of Arneach. For example, MacDonald reports that Buddhist monk storyteller Phra Inta Kaweewong “speaks of reviving the old tales in attractive ways to engage his contemporary audiences” (193). Furthermore, MacDonald shares that all ten of her traditional storytellers do at least some of this: “Though our tellers give strong nods to the traditional tellers from whom they first heard their tales, they clearly make artistic choices in shaping the material for presentation to a contemporary audience” (193). The best way to ensure survival of these tales in the modern age is to add more contemporary elements, while at the same time maintaining the basic plot structure and moral lessons that have made them popular and resilient throughout time. This is an important way in which modern storytellers skillfully shift between different performance contexts—from more traditional settings to more non-traditional.

MacDonald notes that a skilled traditional teller, Chehalis Indian storyteller Curtis DuPuis, “uses the unusual technique, probably that used in his family, of providing several minutes of introduction to each story—more or less talking his way into it” (193). Arneach similarly provides background

information on certain specifically Cherokee elements of his stories when telling in front of non-Cherokee audiences. This background helps his audience get into the story and also to understand the underlying messages of the story better.

Another technique that DuPuis employs is described in the following passage: "In each version of 'Coyote and the Field Mice' the mice were eating goodies, but Curtis improvises their snacks differently with each telling, perhaps matching his own most recent gobbling of goodies" (MacDonald 193). I would argue that, at least sometimes, Curtis refers to "goodies" to which the audience can relate rather than what he has eaten most recently. For example, he might refer to more "trendy," newer snacks with children audiences, while adding details about more familiar treats with adult audiences. Arneach thinks that such adaptations are useful and legitimate when trying to hold the attention of audiences in different performance contexts.

Although he has come to adapt some stories for contemporary audiences, Arneach learned Cherokee stories in the traditional manner as a child on the reservation: "I would sit at family gatherings and listen to [my uncles] tell stories. My Uncle George would tell a story, my Uncle Dave would tell a story—like watching a verbal tennis match, it would go back and forth between the two of them" (Interview). Barbara Duncan, author of *Living Stories of the Cherokee*, says that "it is the process of learning stories in a traditional setting, from family and community, that makes a storyteller 'traditional'" (21). When people learn stories from their family and community,

much information beyond just the story is imparted, including the values of the culture, its aesthetic, and its style of telling—timing, emphasis, inflection. None of these can be learned, by even the most skilled nontraditional storyteller, from reading a story in a book. (Duncan 22)

As Arneach learned the traditional stories from his two uncles, he also learned much about the Cherokee culture, value system, and history. He is clearly a traditional Cherokee storyteller.

Arneach learned his traditional tales from his two uncles, but admits that he has rehearsed and fine-tuned the stories quite extensively, sometimes even in front of a mirror in order to make sure his gestures are coming across appropriately to the audience. In one tale, he talks about an arrow and demonstrates it is split all the way down, visually demonstrating this with one hand up and the index finger from the other hand running down the “split.” Though he had performed this particular tale in public a number of times, he did not realize until he practiced the tale in front of a mirror that, he had the finger along the *palm* of his hand, so that he, and not his audience, could see what was being demonstrated. After this discovery, Arneach said, “So then I started going through and doing it in front of the mirror and it made me aware of what the audience could see, and how I present myself to the audience” (Interview). Scholars “have made clear that Indian storytellers were also creators and performers who added their own variations to traditional stories and who punctuated them with changes in gesture, body movement, facial expression, and

voice pitch and modulation" (Ruoff 276). Though Arneach learned his stories from family members, he has still had to practice, perfect, and add individual touches to the stories throughout the course of his storytelling career.

Marc Bloch has pointed out

that in ancient rural societies, before the institution of the newspaper, the primary school, and military service, the education of the youngest living generation was generally undertaken by the oldest living generation...so that it is from the oldest members of the household, at least as much as if not indeed more than from their own parents, that the memory of the group was mediated to them. (Connerton 39)

Though the traditional context of intimate family setting has been dying out in the recent generations, storytelling is still a major way in which Cherokees transmit information about their culture to the younger generations. And oftentimes it is the older people of the tribe who tell these stories to the younger children; they have time to tell youngsters these stories, they see the value in sharing them, and they still have retained these stories as a part of their cultural heritage. Arneach learned his stories from two uncles who were recognized storytellers in the community. Arneach's children have not chosen to carry on the tradition of storytelling, but his grandchildren may take the tradition into the future. Arneach actively shares the traditional stories with his grandchildren. This certainly lines up with Bloch's claim that "the education of the youngest living generation was generally undertaken by the oldest living generation" (Connerton 39). The very

next generation, Arneach's children, have not chosen to carry on the stories, while his grandchildren may do so. Bloch also proposes the idea that

with the moulding of each new mind there is at the same time a backward step, joining the most malleable to the most inflexible mentality, while skipping the generation which might be the sponsor of change. And this way of transmitting memory, Bloch suggests, must surely have contributed to a very substantial extent to the traditionalism inherent in so many peasant societies.

(Connerton 39)

The "most malleable" generation would clearly be Arneach's grandchildren, with Arnech as the "most inflexible"—terms not meant to be derogatory, but rather expressing traditional allegiances to acculturation and indoctrination into the native culture. The transfer of the stories from the oldest to the youngest generations has kept these traditional stories alive throughout time, Bloch points out. In this way, Arneach does not seem to be worried that his own children are not interested in keeping the tradition, knowing that there are regular patterns of transference of traditional activities that lie outside even the realm of modernity and so-called "progress."

Kay Stone has written that "while less experienced situations and conscious cultural tellers might be more easily discouraged by the loss of supportive and familiar listeners, the more active professional tellers are ready for an opportunity to perform and are willing to adapt to the situation" (170).

Arneach admits that his now-grown children have never been eager to take on the

role of storyteller in the coming generations, though he does hold out some hope for his grandchildren: "Now I have grandkids who are interested in [sharing stores]—my two oldest. Nine, ten, twelve—they are interested in sharing them. I encourage them. They have told stories at school" (Interview). Some people may be discouraged by the fact that their direct progeny do not want to carry on a tradition that is so important to them, but Arneach instead concentrates on spreading the stories and cultural information to broader audiences. Even if it is not his children or even people within the Cherokee tribe, at least the stories are being maintained in some context. In this way, Arneach is not against these newer, larger contexts of sharing Cherokee stories, even though so many have come away from the traditional family context.

Arneach and Other Story Sources

Predating the storytelling revival and even the work of famed folktale collector Richard Chase, one of the early formal gatherers of Native American stories was James Mooney. Roland writes how

toward the end of the [nineteenth century] many pre-Christian origin myths, legends, and wonder tales were told to anthropologist James Mooney by surviving storytellers in Oklahoma and North Carolina. In 1900 these were published as *Myths of the Cherokee* by the Bureau of American Ethnology, a branch of the Smithsonian Institute. (83)

Mooney's collection and publication of these tales were surely one of the earliest large-scale sharing of native stories by Cherokees to an outside researcher, and thus signaled a shift in the context in which Cherokees were willing to share their special tales. Cherokees shared with Mooney many tales that were previously kept only within their own culture. Even though the publication of these tales made them accessible to more people outside the Cherokee culture, it more importantly aided future generations of Cherokee people in their maintenance of the tradition: "Although Elders still remember some of these old stories, Mooney's book has been an invaluable resource to those Cherokee who, like Lloyd Arneach, wish to preserve their storytelling tradition" (Roland 83). In this way, the non-traditional context in which Mooney garnered the tales from the Cherokee people over a century ago has allowed many traditional tellers, such as Arneach, to learn their culture's tales better and, in turn, tell them in both traditional and non-traditional contexts. Arneach also learned his native Cherokee tales from written sources, as Edwina Roland writes. Arneach learned many tales "from oral telling later reinforced by print. He tells them in his own style, smoothly merging elements read with elements heard" (Roland 83). Melissa Heckler corroborates this point: "Contemporary storytellers inherit their art from two traditions, the oral and the literary" (15). The oral tradition represents the more traditional, family context of storytelling, and the literary tradition is closely related to the relatively newer context of public performance and large-scale publishing of the stories.

When Arneach was a child, there was a concern among the Cherokee culture that the old stories were being lost. Charles Ballard observes that the *Report of the Colloquium on the Humanities and the American People* notes, ““Much popular culture—most obviously the general run of commercial television—apparently aspires to deaden consciousness...[and] Some forms of pop culture are antithetical to the reflective life”” (20). There were beginning to be so many more “interesting” and “exciting” forms of popular media that were vying for young Cherokees’ time, they often could not take the time to listen to their people’s traditional stories. One person who took special interest in the endeavor of a renewed interest in Cherokee storytelling was reservation librarian Mary Ohmer, who had moved to Cherokee from Alabama. Arneach explains:

She realized the young people were not learning the old stories, so she gathered a group of us together and had us learn the stories.

Then during the winter, one Saturday out of the month, she’d take about five or six of us out to youth group or to a church to share the stories. (Interview)

Through these sessions, the young Cherokee people continued to learn, respect, and share their traditional stories, even outside of the immediate family setting. The loss of cultural stories is a concern that continues today for the Cherokee people, including Arneach himself. Barbara Duncan writes that “every culture, every story, is only one generation away from extinction. Stories die, simply and quietly, when no one thinks they’re important enough to take the time to tell. Stories can be preserved only by being including in living tradition” (2).

Another well-known Eastern Band Cherokee storyteller, Freeman Owle, also consults early twentieth century Mooney publications for his traditional stories: "The majority of things that I read by and about Native Americans are those older books, especially those written by James Mooney that he published through the Bureau of American Ethnology" (Teuton 195). It seems to be a commonly accepted practice by Native storytellers to consult such older published works, even though they were collected and written by non-Native people. MacDonald writes how "telling traditions, of course, rely on reviving tales from text. Throughout the ages stories have moved into print and back again to oral rendition with regularity" (202). It is not an unusual practice for traditional cultures to draw from print materials of their own traditions in order to strengthen those traditions for the future. This practice involves an interesting variety of performance contexts that seem to transcend the usually accepted boundaries.

Margaret MacDonald has some interesting thoughts that relate specifically to Arneach and the choices he had made about his performance contexts:

The term "traditional storyteller" usually refers to tellers whose repertoires were passed down from others and who share their tales within their own communities. When a teller begins to share their tales beyond the close community, when a teller begins to add to her or his repertoire from books or other traditions, when a teller becomes a part of today's revivalist storytelling movement, can this teller still be considered "traditional"? (199)

While Arneach did learn his stories from his uncles within his native community, he has chosen to share the stories widely with the mainstream culture. Also, Arneach includes in his repertoire stories from other native cultures. In his book *Long-Ago Stories of the Eastern Cherokee* he includes two stories that are non-Cherokee, but are from other Native American tribes: the story of Wounded Knee and the story of Ishi, the last of the Yani people. These additions are an example of how “as traditional tellers encounter other storytelling traditions, they discover tales they want to add to their repertoire” (MacDonald 201). The very fact that Arneach has published books and audio recordings of his stories shows that he is a part of the “revivalist storytelling movement,” the very phenomenon that has allowed the various performance contexts of today to flourish. Though all people would certainly consider Arneach “traditional,” he does share his stories in broader, less traditional performance contexts, as well as adding stories to his repertoire from other traditional cultures.

In his article “Storytelling” in the *Encyclopedia of American Folklife*, John Burrison writes about how the information and technology age has affected the centuries-old art of storytelling:

While the impact of mass media on such face-to-face entertainment is undeniable, it may be more a matter of kind than degree. Older, longer types of narrative, which require a commitment of time and attention on the part of both teller and audience, have given way to briefer, more conversational legends and jests. (1189)

Especially among the younger generation, people's attention spans have been decreasing for traditional arts such as storytelling, which take time to sit down, listen, and process the information presented. Arneach corroborated this point: "...you've got TV, video games, iPods. The kids are walking around with stuff in their ear. [Parents] may be like, 'Let's sit down.' [Kids/teenagers], 'Well, let me finish this, I'm on level number eight, I'll be over in a minute'" (Interview). Young people today are so used to being visually and digitally stimulated continuously and entertained that they may not immediately see the value in the old art of storytelling.

Arneach and Audiences

Every folklore performance

event will have a unique and emergent aspect, depending upon the distinctive circumstances at play. These factors will condition the choice of items for performance, the strategies employed in their use, and often the shape of the emergent text and the structure of the specific situation itself. (Bauman 366)

Those present at any performance by Arneach will determine what stories he chooses to tell, as well as the style of delivery. The "structure of the specific situation itself" (i.e., audience response and feedback) will determine whether or not Arneach chooses to tell those stories that are closest to his heart.

Arneach said, "Ninety-five percent of the people who have never been exposed to storytelling think it's for kids...They don't realize that storytelling is

for all ages, and if you have an experienced storyteller they know how to set up their stories for the audience they've got" (Interview). Simon Bronner agrees: "The ages of participants [in storytelling] are also contextual factors. Although the popular image exists of the grandfather warmly relating a tale to a child on his knee, storytelling occurs from early childhood on" (490). In storytelling cultures, stories are told by people of all ages to others of all ages, throughout their lives. Fifteen-year-old Appalachian storyteller Jennifer Carter says, "Some people think storytelling is just for little kids... They think they've outgrown it—but you never do" (Watson 65). Stories are invaluable sources of moral and social teaching for all age groups and do not simply stop being important once a person reaches a certain age. Arneach shares this insight with his audiences of all ages to help them understand more about his own culture and how they should be receptive to the stories that they are hearing.

Carol Birch writes:

Effective storytellers build bridges. The storyteller says confidently to listeners: "You don't know? You've never seen it? Oh, come here—I'll lead the way..." Then the storyteller offers a hand to lead listeners from the familiar bank of their ordinary lives across the river of Forgetfulness and Remembering to another shore. (123)

This happens particularly in the case of a Cherokee storyteller such as Arneach telling to Euro-American audiences. Most of the audience members would have never before heard the stories that Arneach is about to share with them, and he

quickly connects with audience members and makes them feel comfortable enough with him to take the journey of discovering more about Cherokee culture and the ways in which they view the world.

Simon Bronner writes that “the ages of the storyteller’s listeners and of the storyteller frequently dictate the type of material related” (490). In the interview, Arneach revealed that early on in his storytelling career, he had a different set of stories for each age group of children to whom he told the stories. Then, he “discovered that I could share the same stories with all three [age] groups [of children]... All I do is, for the young kids, I take the detail out because you lose them in the detail. Then as they get older, you can add more detail” (Interview). These different audience contexts force the storyteller to make decisions about the stories they will tell, and what kind of information they share with the audience.

When telling to outsider audiences, Arneach gauges which tale to tell next based on audience reaction to the previous story. He says he never knows what stories he will tell when he goes into the venue, always deciding when he sees the audience, and their subsequent reactions to the stories he tells. John Niles has written that “even if the members of the audience are only passive tradition-bearers, they have as essential role to play in the dialogics of performance. They may urge performers on, rewarding them for their efforts with applause, expressions of interest, and, in a professional context, one or another form of renumeration” (53). The people coming to any of Arneach’s performances are bearers of their own cultures, and thus their very presence represents a link between their own culture and the Cherokee culture. The reaction of the audience

members to specific stories told by the storytellers directly influences subsequent stories that will be told by the teller. Furthermore, "the performer...however abstracted he or she may seem to be, usually has a keen eye for the audience's response" (Niles 53). "Applause" and other "expressions of interest" are just some ways in which Arneach gauges how any particular audience is reacting to a story, and the context in which the teller is happening.

Principal Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokees Joyce Conseen Dugan remarks on the different digital contexts through which Cherokee stories are shared today: "You may have heard these legends on cassette tape. Soon you may hear them via computer, and in the next millennium we can only guess the media through which you will experience these stories" (Duncan xi). The context in which people learn the traditional Cherokee stories is constantly changing as technology develops. In order to continue the tradition of storytelling into the coming millennia, traditional tellers must be able to be flexible in the contexts in which they are willing to share their tales. Arneach demonstrates his willingness to do this, as he has both audio recordings and print materials available for sale. He said, "I've got a CD out called *Can You Hear the Smoke?*"... And I have two books out" (Interview). Having such materials available for interested parties for purchase both extends his reach as a personal teller of the Cherokee stories, as well as information about Cherokee culture and tradition as a whole.

Native Adaptation and Arneach's Practices

Arneach has helped the continuation of the traditional Cherokee stories by selectively refashioning them for more contemporary audiences. He recognizes the importance of the timeless, underlying themes and messages of the stories, but also the fact that young people must understand and be able to relate to the stories or they simply will not pay attention to them. Arneach speaks specifically about one Cherokee teller who included such contemporary elements in his story as an energy drink, a cell phone, and an iPod:

I said, "Yes, that's what we need to get because we're so tied up in 'This is the traditional story.'" It's a story, yes. And I had never taken myself seriously, but I take storytelling and the stories seriously. But we also have to have laughter in there also. They understand, well this is contemporary; everybody knows what an energy drink is...Now, we can understand this. (Interview)

Arneach seems to be open to altering the traditional stories, as long as their original messages remain intact, so they are more accessible to modern generations. In this way, "over the years, stories or portions of stories originally categorized as myths can become tales" (Ruoff 275). Perhaps some of the tales that are altered to become more "contemporary" lose some of their appeal of being "ancient" and "traditional" in the process, at least from the view of the very conservative, older members and elders of the tribe.

Arneach is one of these "exceptionally talented individuals" described in the following passage:

Unlike the majority of people from the same community, these exceptionally talented individuals delight in their ability to entertain others through their mastery of certain knowledge and skills. Friends, family, and neighbors may possess a similar body of knowledge and may have developed some skills along similar lines, but for whatever reasons, those other people rarely break through into performance. (Niles 176)

Surely, there are many Cherokee people—if not all—who know most of the same stories that Arneach does, yet he is one of the few who has chosen to share the stories with a more mainstream audience. Arneach's willingness and flexibility to shift from the familiar, home context to a more Euro-American audience show his commitment to the Cherokee stories and how important they are to retain even if they are not retained exclusively in the Cherokee culture. Some Cherokee people are only willing to tell stories within their own families or at powwows on the Qualla Boundary in Cherokee, North Carolina—thus keeping the stories only within their native community. While the stories are still being kept alive today, it is much less likely that the stories will stand the test of time being kept only within the native culture due to acculturation and accommodation within the broader mainstream American culture. Arneach enjoys sharing his native stories with people outside the culture also because he knows that the stories contain messages important for all people—universal truths that are valuable and worth learning by all of humanity. Many Cherokee “storytellers now travel the country sharing Cherokee history and stories with executives, doctors, schoolteachers,

other American Indians, and the wider public in settings that range from concert halls to living rooms to reenactors' rendezvous" (Duncan 15). Arneach also knows that by taking the stories to the outside culture, he is helping to ensure their longevity for longer than he would be keeping them exclusively within the Cherokee culture.

Related to the ideas of newer, non-traditional performance contexts, Robin Horton has an interesting view on the role of memory and changes in orally transmitted stories over time:

On the one hand, memory tends to remould the past in the image of the present, and hence to minimize the amount of change that has taken place down through the ages. On the other hand, memory tends, over the generations, to ascribe all innovations, whether sociocultural or intellectual, to an initial "time of beginnings." Oral transmission, therefore, encourages a view of the past which sees the main outlines of one's society as having been shaped long ago and as having undergone little change since then. (qtd. in Ballenger 792)

In other words, at the same time that individual cultures attempt to retain the "purity" of their ancestral stories, the stories are inevitably being reshaped and transformed due to the very passage of time that is occurring. Such change is inevitable, and should be acceptable, in all cultures if they expect to retain any of the historical aspects of their heritage.

Change and progress are inevitable and cannot be avoided by any cultural group in this day and age, so adding contemporary elements to his stories seems to be a very smart move on the part of Arneach, both from the perspective of the preservation of Cherokee culture and for holding his audience's interest. Walter Ong adds that "'Originality' in oral cultures... 'consists not in the introduction of new materials but in fitting the traditional materials effectively into each individual, unique situation'" (qtd. in Ballenger 793). Arneach is using originality and creativity to keep the traditions of his people alive and vibrant in the twenty-first century. The traditional Cherokee stories are not so much being radically changed, but rather adapted so that they are applicable and effective in "each individual, unique situation."

Joyce Conseen Dugan, then the Principal Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokees, also agrees with Arneach on change in tradition: "Through the years, these legends have grown and changed and become contemporary along with Cherokee people... The critical message is that the stories continue" (Duncan xi). Once again, change is acceptable so long as the ancestral tales retain their age-old morals and stories. Furthermore,

Traditional stories and values have survived changes in language and in the outward form of the culture. Cherokee people drive cars and live in modern houses, but the use of modern technology doesn't necessarily mean the loss of traditional culture. Values, stories, and ideas have a reality of their own. (Duncan 6)

The use of such modern technology as cell phones and iPods in everyday life does not necessarily exist in opposition to Cherokee culture. Modern-day storytellers and preservers of culture are finding creative ways to meld the timeless values and messages of the traditional stories with the material culture of today in order for the rising generations to have a sustained interest in the traditional Cherokee stories.

Arneach's Commitment to Continuing Stories

The continued existence and sharing of the traditional Cherokee stories is of utmost important to Lloyd Arneach. Duncan writes that "in learning all these lessons, we also learn the place of a Cherokee person in relationship to the rest of the world. If you are a Cherokee child hearing these stories, you learn all these things, and above all you learn what it means to be Cherokee" (13). For this reason, it is important to the Cherokee people that their stories continue to be told to the coming generations, especially in the context of a larger society that does not necessarily embrace or celebrate Cherokee heritage. Kimberly Blaeser observes:

Indian people don't really instruct their children, they story them—that is, not only tell them stories, but encourage them to hear and see the stories of the world around them, admonish them to remember the stories, and encourage them to create or discover their own stories. (101)

Storytelling is such an integral part of the Cherokee culture that people communicate countless facets of their lives in the form of story—from how one should live to the very origins of their people.

Arneach speaks on the impact of modern entertainment options:

The stories came about because there was no television, there was no radio. In the evenings, they would sit around and they would do handicrafts because they were trying to raise extra money. Well, while they're sitting there they would start telling the stories. And so the kids would learn them like this. Father may be doing wood-carving, mother may be working on beadwork, finger-weaving or basketry. And as they're sitting there, they started to share the stories. (Interview)

Today, families simply do not spend time together as they used to, and economic opportunity does not necessitate the sharing of cottage-industry tasks such as wood carving, beadwork, or basketry. Today, family members spend more time involved in their individual pursuits and interests, even when at home during the evening, whereas in the past, the family spent more time together as a unit, sharing history and stories of their people's past.

One venue in which the Cherokee stories are actively being maintained and passed on is in the Reservation schools: "Although children may not live in extended families as often as they did in the past, they are hearing more traditional Cherokee stories in schools" (Duncan 14). Duncan explains that "Cherokee stories were and continue to be used consciously to educate children in

cultural values and to reaffirm those values for adults" (12). She notes that "in the town of Cherokee, North Carolina, stories are told in the schools, at the Cherokee Museum, at the Oconaluftee Living History Village, at the Tsalii Manor retirement home, and at various events during the year" (14). Arneach expresses this same sentiment: "...we have people who are going into the elementary schools and sharing...So, the kids are still learning the stories and I think that is wonderful. But none of the teenagers have been willing to get up and share a story" (Interview). So, in this way, there is a mixed sense of hope for the future of Cherokee storytelling. Arneach realistically acknowledges the many outside forces competing for the time and attention of youngsters, while at the same time hopes they will come to see the inherent value and honor in the traditional tales. And for this reason, they will take an interest in them and continue the art in the coming generations.

MacDonald recognizes the combination of tradition in the practice of New Caledonian storyteller Leonard Sam: "traditional [teller] who [performs] within their own culture but in non-traditional settings," as he "now tells in school and museum settings rather than in the fireside settings of his youth" (204). Similarly, Arneach learned his traditional Cherokee stories at family gatherings from two uncles, but today he tells predominantly in more public settings. Arneach is a teller who has continued the traditional tales in his own native community, as well as spreading the tales with outsiders visiting the reservation and at performances throughout the region. He has often been invited to tell stories at the local schools, even remarking that his schedule is so busy that sometimes the schools

do not ask him far enough in advance and he has to decline. However, Arneach does still maintain the tradition within his own family, having told the stories and culture lessons to his children as they were growing up, and now sharing the stories with his grandchildren.

Betty Duggan writes that "the physical and visual juxtapositioning of the touristic and tribal within modern Cherokee is emblematic of the predominant role that tourism has played in the daily lives of many Eastern Cherokees" (47). The traditional stories have been sometimes adapted for sharing with the public at large, and the fact that tourism has become a major part of the lives of the Cherokee people has meant that the traditional stories are also being shared with non-Cherokees visiting the reservation. Many Cherokee people see this as acceptable, so long as their traditions are being maintained in some form that represents their original themes and meanings. As Duncan writes,

Storytelling is part of Cherokee culture, and it...is alive and strong. Cherokee people have always told stories to their children, among their families, and in their community, but in recent years, Cherokee storytellers have begun to share stories with the general public at events outside the Cherokee community. (1)

Lloyd Arneach is one such ambassador of Cherokee culture, history, and stories to the broader American culture. When asked how he feels about how storytelling is being preserved today, Arneach responded: "Yeah, with this it's excellent because we have people who tell stories here, but they're telling in a very limited clientele. It's like at powwows, they only tell at powwows. And I'll tell under virtually any

conditions, anywhere" (Interview). He is willing to share the traditional tales under many circumstances, and to most audiences, as long as they are people who are going to be receptive and respectful of the traditional stories.

Barbara Duncan has written that "Cherokee storytelling, at least in its public forms, has changed from being presented mainly in the Cherokee language to being mainly in English, but it is still distinctly Cherokee" (6). The shift in language is due largely in part to the different contexts in which Cherokee stories are now presented. In the more traditional contexts, the stories were told in the native Cherokee language, while today in more non-traditional contexts English must be the language of choice due to the many non-Cherokee audience members. Duncan goes on to write that "today these stories are told publicly in English, although in some families they are still told in Cherokee" (16). This adaptation makes sense because the family context is the most traditional, and therefore it would make sense that the stories are still told in that context in the native language. The public performances are the newer contexts, and therefore English being the language of choice makes sense. Duncan also addresses the perceived differences between the original Cherokee-language versions of the stories and the newer, English versions: "The English versions are full of meaning and memorable characters and events. Most important, they have become traditional tellings in themselves as English-speaking parents and elders pass them on to younger generations" (18). Even though the instrumentality (i.e., language) in which the stories are told have been altered, the meanings and moral lessons at their core remain. In the past, the traditional Cherokee stories which Arneach

continues telling today were told only in the Cherokee language. It is only the telling of these stories in English today that allows them to be shared in these newer performance contexts. The moral lessons are the most important parts of the stories and should not be taken away regardless of the context in which the stories are told. Interestingly, Duncan points out that the English-language Cherokee tales have at this point *become* traditional because they are being preserved and passed on within the culture by English-speaking bearers of the tradition. This is an interesting example of how performance and cultural context directly affects—and changes—tradition.

Upper Skagit Indian storyteller Vi Hilbert has trained many young Upper Skagit people who are carrying on the storytelling tradition, as well as non-Indian tellers who want to continue the tradition. Hilbert “has consistently insisted that the tales *must* be told by any teller who will carry them on—Indian or non-Indian. For this she has received criticism within the Native American community” (MacDonald 196). Arneach also believes that the tradition must continue, and does not see a problem with non-Cherokee people telling his people’s stories, so long as they are maintained in a respectable manner.

In discussing the different types of storytellers working today, Joseph Sobol remarks that “still others are performing nativistic exercises, selectively representing in their storytelling the traditions of their own ethnic ancestors yet often, quite naturally, wielding those traditions on behalf of explicitly contemporary political and cultural programs” (*Journey* 7). Arneach represents the traditions of his Cherokee ancestors through the uniquely Cherokee tales he

chooses to share with a variety of audiences, yet also tailors some of these stories to the interests and familiarity level of his audiences. For example, he does not see the harm in adding more contemporary elements or details to the traditional tales, so long as the original morals and lessons are maintained. In adding such details as brand-names and products easily recognizable by children at school performances, Arneach is more likely to grab their attention and maintain their focus through the telling of the tale. Simon Bronner writes:

Storytelling changes according to the needs and demands of the situation in which it occurs. The function of storytelling—depends on the intent of the narrator and the composition of the audience, as well as the place in which they interact and the nature of the material presented. As there are many contexts for people to gather, so there are many contexts for storytelling. (490)

Contemporary storytellers—as has been true throughout history—have to carefully tailor and shape the stories of their repertoire to fit the audience to which they are currently telling tales in order to best reach and connect with that audience. Arneach is one such skilled storyteller who does this, and thus is able to carry his traditional stories to wider audiences and contexts.

Arneach's Contextual Adaptations and Cherokee Identity

Birch writes, “The most effective storytellers do two things: *they capitalize on who they are* as they tell a story and *they tell the story to the people who are in front of them*” (111). Both of these things are done regardless of the

context of performance—be it the traditional family setting, an elementary school performance, or festival audience of a thousand-plus people. Arneach capitalizes on who he is as a Cherokee man, as he shares the native stories as well as important details about Cherokee culture that help to illuminate the themes and meanings in the stories for non-Cherokee audiences. Also, Arneach tells the story to the specific people who are in front of him because he does not plan in advance what stories he will tell at any certain venue, but rather decides when he sees the audience. Also, the audience's reaction to each story he tells during the course of his performance determines what subsequent stories he will tell.

Arneach discusses the desired scenario in which an audience is responding strongly to the story being told:

Quite often I'll get an audience that is really responding, like when I'm sharing a vision: "I was walking along the path, I looked out and I saw the eagle soaring on the wind." And I see their faces and I hear their reactions, and I know they're seeing the same thing. We're traveling together. When an audience really connects like that, then I start sharing another series of stories that are more moving because I know they'll respect those stories as I do. (Interview)

Of course, it is these types of audiences that Arneach enjoys telling to the most, but he does not always tell for audiences that respect and treasure the stories as he does. In most cases, though, he is limited to telling less meaningful stories that do not express such deep truths about the Cherokee culture and belief system.

Arneach discusses how he selectively chooses the audiences with whom he will

share certain Cherokee sacred stories that have deeper meaning to him. In such cases, "many stories we choose to tell may touch deep places in audience members. People often feel the desire to respond to the teller on a more intimate level" (Heckler 31-32).

When Arneach shares such special stories with these selective audiences, they surely will connect with the story on a deeper level. When this happens, the larger audience context is more closely related to the traditional family context in which Arneach learned his tales. Such moments cross the boundary between traditional context and more contemporary, mainstream context. Gifted storytellers "demonstrate what happens in those moments when strong communication exists between a performer and his or her audience, bridging people's separate identities and sparking recognition of their common character or fate" (Niles 49). When Arneach connects with his audience on a deeper level on such occasions, he crosses boundaries of cultural difference that are not easily traversed by other means. Furthermore, he helps his audience members to realize that they share common challenges, hopes, fears, and morals as the Cherokee culture, thus bringing the realization that there are not so many cultural differences between them as previously thought.

Arneach and "The Origin of the Strawberries"

One of the most common themes of all American Indian stories is that of the tribe's origins. Patrick Mullen has written, "Concerning social memory in particular, we may note that images of the past commonly legitimate a present

social order. It is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory" (3). This "shared memory" of the Cherokee people is transmitted most frequently through the passing down of the traditional stories, which tells people what is most important to the Cherokee and what they should strive for and value in their own lives. Stories about the origin of man and other important historical events give the Cherokee people grounding and a point of reference in the world today as they connect to their ancestral culture.

The Cherokee version of an origin story known as "The Origin of the Strawberries" or "The First Strawberries" is roughly accepted as the Cherokee version of the Christian Adam and Eve story. Leonard Bloomfield "defines [as] 'mystic' those stories designed to inform and instruct, which often explain the origin of things and are set in a distant past when the world was being formed" (Ruoff 275). In this way, the story of "The First Strawberries" could be seen as a mystic story. Kimberly Blaeser explains that many place-based narratives "may tell the origins of things in the world" (101). Such stories of origin "provide a way for both outsiders and insiders to understand and to remember the larger worldview of the culture, since stories reflect this worldview while also reinforcing it" (Duncan 24). When those from outside the Cherokee culture hear "The First Strawberries," they learn about the distinct values of the Cherokee, as well as notice similarities to the Christian model of origins.

Arneach shares the traditional story "The First Strawberries" both within and outside of Cherokee culture, though he has found that he has to alter the characters slightly in the version for the culture at large. He says if he shares this

story outside of the Cherokee community, “it’s normally husband and wife, but in our version, they’re talking about ‘she was gathering food to share with her man’” (Interview). He has learned, over the course of losing a number of story bookings at schools, that the traditional Cherokee characters of “man” and “woman” have to be replaced with “husband” and “wife” in order to be acceptable. After using the terms “man” and “woman” at a public school on one occasion, Arneach reports that the administrators of the school said:

“He cannot come back; he’s not politically correct.” You wanted to hear our traditional stories; this is how we’ve heard them. And in our story, she was gathering food to share with her man. And I never said “husband and wife.” “Oh, oh, they weren’t married?” “Why, who would marry them? This is the first man and the first woman. Who would marry them?” And it’s our version of Adam and Eve. But that part of it—who married Adam and Eve. Well, they weren’t married. “Oh, well who married Adam and Eve?” “Well, that’s beside the point.” Well, my point exactly. You want them to be married but Adam and Eve were not. Do you share that? (Interview)

This quite contradictory view held by white school administrators who fully accept the Christian story of Adam and Eve being legitimately “together” as “man and woman” could not come to terms with the same situation that exists in Cherokee legend. It seems unfortunate that Arneach has to alter the traditional stories in the name of being “politically correct”—an issue that apparently only is

an issue for stories of Indian origin. Furthermore, it is unlikely that children would associate, internalize, or even notice the slight nuance in the terms “man and woman” versus the acceptable “husband and wife.”

In regards to Native American storytelling for a mainstream audience, Joseph Bruchac has written that “if things are not stereotypically visible or easily understandable from a Euro-American frame of reference, then they do not exist” (92). Such is the case for the Cherokee “The First Strawberries” tale, a performance for which Arneach has received criticism over the years for the two main characters not being married yet living together. He logically compares this story to the Christian story of Adam and Eve, but because audience members may not immediately recognize the characters as the Christian versions of the first man and the first woman, they raise issue with the story’s morality. Such is an example of Euro-Americans quickly dismissing the validity and moral teachings of a Cherokee story simply because they do not recognize it as containing familiar characters that have been deemed acceptable to them.

Arneach’s “Spear-Finger” in Three Contexts

Another subgenre of Cherokee stories is supernatural stories, which have to do with the unexplainable elements and beings of nature. In American Indian stories and mythology, “people and other beings...have stories associated with them” (Blaeser 102). The evil Spear-Finger was once so much of a threat to the Cherokee people that there is a popular legend now devoted to her, her demise, and her still very real threat in the mountains. The fact that there is a legend that

is still passed on today about this character shows the importance of her and her deeds in the formation of the Cherokee people of western North Carolina. As Kimberly Blaeser says, "The natural and what is often called the supernatural are understood as being woven together in the essence of place, both realms a natural part of [the American Indian] experience" (101). Truly, the natural and the supernatural are "woven together" in the "Legend of Spear-Finger" because the Cherokee still today believe that the evil shape-shifter known as Spear-Finger is lurking in the mountains near their homeland, waiting for a foolish Cherokee to reveal the location of her dislocated finger so that she can once again wreck havoc on the Cherokee people.

One of the stories that Lloyd Arneach most frequently tells at his storytelling performances is the traditional supernatural Cherokee tale "Spear-Finger." I have encountered versions of this story in three different contexts: during a personal interview with Mr. Arneach on February 28, 2009 in Cherokee; on a video recording from the One North Carolina Festival; and in his published book *Long-Ago Stories of the Eastern Cherokee*. The One North Carolina Festival was held in conjunction with the second inauguration of Governor Michael Easley on January 15, 2005 in Raleigh. This Festival afforded Arneach and other North Carolina storytellers, including Orville Hicks, the opportunity to showcase their stories and traditions with people throughout the state.

The versions of this story that are prefaced by the most detailed sections of metanarration are his performance at the One North Carolina Festival and the printed story in his book. Before sharing the tale at the festival, Arneach says,

I would like to share one about one of our monsters. Now, this monster is what we call a shape-shifter. In a normal shape she looked like somebody's little old grandmother but her skin, although it looked like normal skin, was hard as stone. Arrows would hit her and bounce off; spear points would break.

In the book, Arneach begins by saying, "We had monsters in our culture. Some of these were shape-shifters, or those who would change their shapes to look like anybody they wanted to. This shape-shifter looked like a little old lady in her normal shape" (98). He then continues with the same lines about Spear-Finger's skin and what would happen when arrows and spear points hit her.

When Arneach shared this story with me in an interview context, he began by saying, "Okay, this is one that we have, it's one of the children's favorites. And it's got a shape-shifter. Now a shape-shifter could change their shape and this individual could change her change to look like anybody she wanted to. And she looked like a little old lady, somebody's grandmother." During the interview, Arneach did not include the passage on Spear-Finger's skin or about the result if objects struck it. This was probably due to the fact that this was such a unique context and he was skipping certain details of the story in order to tell it quickly, yet without losing meaning. The story told in all three contexts describes the "normal" shape of Spear-Finger to be a "little old lady," with the interview and Festival versions specifying that she looked like "somebody's grandmother." This detail becomes important later in the festival context, when Arneach talks about the warrior's who mistakenly identifies Spear-Finger as *his* grandmother.

All three versions go on to describe, in almost exactly the same words, the only body part of Spear-Finger that does not change when she shifts her shape: her right index finger—which is longer than usual and contains her trademark spear at the end of it. Arneach continues to describe how Spear-Finger would attack her victims. In both the festival and the book contexts, Arneach says, “She was a monster because she lived on human livers.” In the interview, Arneach omitted this line, but this fact was soon apparent. At this point in the story, the three versions of the story contain almost the same details and passages, but in a notably different order. There are formularized passages and details about the story that Arneach feels each audience needs to hear, but sometimes he may forget to insert these details and later come back and add them. He does this in such a skillful way that it is not even noticeable to the audience, unless of course they perhaps have seen another performance of the same tale.

The book version first discusses how Spear-Finger always had to keep her right hand and index finger hidden down in a basket so no one would realize it was her, then she discusses how she attacks her victims, and finally how she would try to lure children. In the festival context, Arneach first tells about Spear-Finger’s method of attacking, then how she would try to lure children, and within that section, he described how she had to keep her right index finger down in a basket. In the interview version of the tale, Arneach tells about her method of attacking next, but does not talk about her luring children or hiding her index finger until after he has talked about the fall bonfire that the Cherokees hold annually in the forest. In this way, Arneach connects the ritual of the bonfire and

of the Cherokee being out in the forest with Spear-Finger having opportunity to attack and kill people. Arneach also makes this connection in the book version of the tale, but does not in the festival version. Arneach talks about this annual fire in the festival context, but he talks about it more in terms of a ritual activity, and does not so much indicate that Spear-Finger preys upon the Cherokee people during this event. He even adds during the interview, "I'm jumping ahead here," so I realize that details are being left out of this version of the tale. This was necessary because he was not in a formal performance and did not need to take the time to tell the usual version of the tale that he would normally tell on stage.

There are some notable differences between the three versions here that exist due to the difference of performance context. In the festival context, Arneach next says, "If she got close enough, she would stab somebody with that finger and it's like they would go to sleep. And she'd be able to open up your body, take out the liver and then cause the body to heal back." This is nearly verbatim to the lines spoken in the interview version. At the festival, he continues, "In a little while, the person would wake up, and they didn't feel any pain and they would continue on with their daily life until in a few days they would take sick and die." The book version of this section is also exactly the same as the version told at the Festival, although this passage does come at a slightly different time in the story. The only difference between these versions is that in the book version Arneach uses the plural "they" throughout the whole passage, denoting that Spear-Finger is capable of attacking many people and also simplifying the issue of pronoun agreement in the written text. In the book,

Arneach says Spear-Finger attacks “people” and later refers to the people as “they,” while in the festival version he says she attacks “the person” and later refers to the person also as “they.” Interestingly, Arneach seemed to personalize this same section of the story in the interview context by shifting the pronoun to second person: “In a little while, you’d wake up; it’s like you didn’t feel any pain. You didn’t realize anything had happened, but in a few days you would take sick and die.” While in the festival context of a large audience he used the third person in this passage to show that it could be any of the audience members, he used the second person to address only me during the interview session.

The section that describes how Spear-Finger lures children in the woods is much more detailed in the festival and book versions of the tale than in the interview version. In both the festival and book contexts, Arneach describes how Spear-Finger roamed the woods and looked for children walking alone. In the festival context, he said that Spear-Finger might say to a young girl, “Come, little one, let me comb your hair. I have some honey in this basket and you can eat it while I comb your hair.” In the book context, Arneach narrates Spear-Finger said to young people in the woods, ““Come here little ones. I have some honey in my basket and you can eat it while I comb you hair”” (101). This difference between Spear-Finger luring specifically girls with this line or luring all young people does not make a difference in the plot of the story. Though not conclusive evidence, on the video recording of the One North Carolina Festival, there are several little girls sitting in the front row of the auditorium and there are no little boys that can

is most likely due to time constraints in the interview setting, thus eliminating details that do not have a major effect on the plot of the tale. Moreover, Arneach adds a short passage in the festival context that he does not include at either of the other two contexts: "One warrior starts to jump up and he says, 'That's my grandmother.' The warriors grabbed him and pulled him back and they said, 'No, everybody's in the villages. We made sure before we left. That's Spear-Finger.' He sank back down in the bushes." This detail really shows how much Spear-Finger could shift her shape to look like "somebody's grandmother," as Arneach says at the beginning of the tale. This passage he includes in this performance context seems to substantiate his claims about how much Spear-Finger could look like whomever she desired.

In all three versions of the story, Spear-Finger does fall down into the pit and she is trapped by the Cherokee, though they fear she could claw her way out if they do not act quickly. In order to render Spear-Finger's powers useless, the Cherokee receive the help of a bird or birds, depending upon the performance context. In both the festival and the book contexts, Arneach says, "Then a little bird flew over the pit and sang a song that sounded like the Cherokee word for heart. They took this as a sign to aim at her heart" (103). During the interview, Arneach says, "Again, I'm summarizing the story just a little bit here" and he proceeds to leave out this detail of the bird and its song. A bird then flies down into the pit and lands on her "right hand next to her index finger" (103) in the book and interview versions, and "on her right index finger" in the Festival context. In all three performances, Arneach says, "They took this as a sign to aim

at her right hand" (103). When they proceed to do this, "they saw Spear-Finger change from anger and rage to fear and terror because her heart was contained in the palm of her right hand and she always kept her first tightly closed to protect it" in all three versions of the story. Her heart was where her power lay and thus striking at it rendered her completely powerless against the Cherokee people.

In the book context of this story, the next lines end the story: "Finally, an arrow struck her at the base of her index finger and she fell over dead. And that is the story of Spearfinger" (104). This version of the tale certainly seems more conclusive in that Spear-Finger is declared "dead" and there is no possibility of her coming back to life mentioned as they is in the versions told at the Festival and during the interview. Perhaps within the context of a published book, such an ending is more satisfactory to readers and the information about the Cherokee tradition of passing Spear-Finger's finger down through the generations, and still not revealing its location, do not have as much of a role in a book. In oral performance contexts, perhaps Arneach feels that he can include more about the Cherokee cultural connections with this story and how it still plays a role in his people's culture today. In Richard Bauman's words, Arneach is including "the information [that] one needs to know about the culture and the community in order to understand the content, the meaning, the 'point' of an item of folklore, as the people themselves understand it" (363). In this way, the festival and interview versions go on to include more detail about what happened after Spear-Finger was successfully struck with an arrow. In these contexts, Arneach explains how the warriors went back into the woods and had a secret ballot to select who would be

the keeper of Spear-Finger's severed right index finger. Then all the warriors "left from the mountains so no one would see, no one would figure out who had been selected. That warrior came back, dropped down in the pit, picked up the finger and wrapped it in deerskin." He would keep the finger in secrecy for the rest of his life, and would pass it along to his oldest son only when he was on his deathbed. In this way, "So it was passed from father to son, from generation to generation." This practice shows how the story of Spear-Finger is still pertinent to the Cherokee people in the modern age.

Arneach concludes his versions of "Spear-Finger" in both the interview and the festival contexts with a section of metanarration about the importance of the story in Cherokee lore and how it is regarded with respect. At the festival Arneach says:

People will say, "Well, that's just a story." That may be, but if you ask our Elders, "Do you know where the finger is hidden?" they won't tell you because they feel the spirit of Spear-Finger is still roaming the Great Smokies and if the spirit finds out where the finger is hidden, she will be able to come back, join up with the finger—Spear-Finger will come back to life, and terrorize my people once again.

The metanarration he added at the end of the version he told during the interview was similar but with a few different details. In the interview metanarration of this tale, Arneach says that people in general will never answer the question of where the finger is hidden, and then after describing how Spear-Finger will come

back and join up with her finger, he says that the Cherokee Elders will also not answer this question.

Arneach's Version of "The First Tobacco"

Another story that Arneach tells frequently in various performance contexts is "The First Tobacco," which is a traditional Cherokee story that tells the origin of the Cherokee cultivation of the tobacco plant. Arneach has told this story in many different contexts, and three contexts in which I have heard him tell the tale are on his CD recording *Can You Hear the Smoke?*, on a video recording of the One North Carolina Festival in Raleigh, and in his published book *Long-Ago Stories of the Eastern Cherokee*. There were far fewer major structural differences noted in the various versions of this tale than in Arneach's tellings of "Spear-Finger." The versions of this story that Arneach tells in each of these three performance contexts all begin with the same lines, spoken nearly verbatim in each context: "In the old days, before the Cherokee lost the gift of being able to talk to the animals, we had one tobacco plant. In those days, we used it for healing." Arneach then tells his audiences in all three contexts that an old Cherokee woman became ill and was visited by the medicine man, who said that he needed a leaf from the tobacco plant in order to heal her. The medicine man sent a warrior to get a leaf from the tobacco plant, which the Cherokees kept deep in the woods. When the warrior arrives at where the tobacco plant should be, he finds only a hole in the ground and the tracks of geese. Arneach says, "In those days, geese were fierce fighters and nobody wanted to fight with them unless they

really had to.” The warrior goes back to the village to tell the medicine man what he has discovered, and the medicine man realizes that the Cherokee will have to send someone to the geese’s camp in the south to retrieve their tobacco plant.

In the festival context, Arneach says that the medicine man calls in “the animals, the warriors, and the wise men” to decide who will go to the geese’s camp, while in both the book and CD recording contexts, he says that the medicine man calls in only “the animals and the warriors.” Regardless of who exactly is present at this meeting, in all three contexts of this tale, “the deer said he would go” to the geese’s camp to try to retrieve a leaf from the tobacco plant. The deer travels south to the geese’s camp, but is attacked and killed by the fierce geese, despite his speed and agility. The medicine man knows when the deer has been killed and once again calls together the group of esteemed Cherokees and animals in order to decide who they will send next to try to get a leaf from the tobacco plant. This time, in all three of the performance contexts, Arneach says, “The bear said he would go.” Only in the Festival version of the tale does Arneach say directly after it has been decided that the bear will go, “Well, the bear’s big and powerful but he’s much slower than the deer.” This statement compares the strengths and weaknesses of the bear to the deer that was killed by the geese. Overall, this statement does not seem to be overly hopeful for the soon-to-be-realized similar fate of the bear.

The bear travels and reaches the geese’s camp and is also attacked and swiftly killed by the fierce geese, despite its strength and size. Again, the medicine man knew instinctively when the bear had been killed so he called

together another meeting to decide who would go next to attempt to retrieve a tobacco leaf. When the medicine asks for someone to go in the Festival version of this story, Arneach says, "This time, everybody was quiet. The deer, as fast and agile as he was, had been killed. The bear, as big and as formidable as he was, had been killed. Then, the little hummingbird flew up on the medicine man's finger and he said, 'I will go.'" When Arneach told this story in the context of the One North Carolina Festival in Raleigh, he included the accounts of only three animals that went to get a tobacco leaf: the deer, the bear, and the hummingbird. In the book and CD recording contexts of this same tale, he included an additional episode of another animal that made a failed attempt: the mole. Arneach most likely skipped the mole episode in his telling of this at the festival due to time constraints, as he was on a very strictly set schedule of only forty minutes in which to perform. Of course, Arneach has complete control over the length of this story when he records—be it in audio or print form—this story in his book and on his CD.

In the contexts in which Arneach includes the mole episode, it proceeds almost exactly the same as those of the deer and bear, except for the unique tactic of the mole to travel underground and attempt to obtain a leaf. However, he still fails at this mission and the medicine man soon realizes he too has been killed by the geese. The third or fourth animal to volunteer to travel to the geese's camp is the hummingbird. After the hummingbird says he will go, Arneach says, "Someone asked, 'You? What can you do?'" in the CD recording and book contexts (48). He says, "They asked, 'You? What can you do?'" in the festival

context. It is interesting, although not greatly impactful to the plot of the tale, that Arneach says that the whole group shares this sentiment in the festival context, while in the book and CD contexts it is only one person who says this. When no one else volunteers to go, the hummingbird takes off for the camp of the geese in the south. In the context of his book, Arneach explains the actions of the hummingbird once he reaches their camp:

He flew up and landed on the branch of a tree. Below him were the circle of Geese and the tobacco plant. Darting over the Geese, he landed on the tobacco plant. Quickly, he looked around and realized the Geese were so busy talking that they hadn't seen him. Snipping off some seeds and a leaf, he held them in his beak. Darting back over the heads of the Geese, he landed on the tree branch again. He still hadn't been seen. (48)

Arneach describes this success of the hummingbird nearly verbatim in the contexts of the Festival and CD recording. The hummingbird flies back to the land of the Cherokee with tobacco leaf and seeds in his beak, and the medicine man saves the life of the old woman. The medicine man tells the warriors, "Go, plant these throughout our land so we will never want for our medicine again."

After the text of this story in *Long-Ago Stories of the Eastern Cherokee*, Arneach includes the moral lesson of this story in the form of metanarration, as opposed to the story of "Spear-Finger" in the book, which does not contain any metanarration after the text. In the festival context of this tale he says, "All too often we will look at this shell we all live in and we'll decide what a person can

and cannot do—simply by looking at the shell. And that is wrong. The hummingbird teaches us the shell is not important. What is important is what is in the heart.” Arneach shares this lesson in nearly the same words in both the book and CD recording contexts. The audience takes away a lesson after listening to this tale, and can infer that this story was used by the Cherokee people as a teaching tale, perhaps specifically in certain occasions in which a person seemed to need this lesson.

Overall, the versions of “The First Tobacco” that are contained in both the CD recording and book form are the more formularized forms of this tale, judging by the many differences between those versions and the version of the tale told at the festival. The changes that Arneach makes in the version of this tale that he tells at the festival are due to time constraints and personalization for that particular audience. Many words and brief passages that differ between these three performance contexts can be attributed to the fact that Arneach does not have his traditional tales memorized word-for-word, and thus allows for spontaneous changes. However, there are much fewer major structural differences between these three versions of “The First Tobacco”—save the omission of the mole episode in the Festival version—than in three of Arneach’s tellings of “Spear-Finger.” Perhaps this points to the fact that “The First Tobacco” seems to be a more formularized story in his repertoire and thus he does not insert longer passages or information at various points in the story.

Arneach the Adaptive Traditionalist

Lloyd Arneach's story is an interesting one in which a traditional storyteller leaves his home area, then is encouraged by outsiders to begin sharing his tales publicly, he does so, and eventually returns to his home in Cherokee to share both within his native community as well as with many non-Cherokee audiences. Arneach is aware that oral traditions have only been kept alive through time because they have been actively shared within native cultures, but he is simultaneously aware that with the onslaught of modern forms of entertainment competing for the time of contemporary Cherokee people, his beloved stories have a much greater chance of survival in their original oral form if he is open to sharing them with outsider audiences as well. For this reason, Arneach has been sharing traditional Cherokee culture with school, festival, and workshop audiences for nearly twenty years in the southeastern United States. Thanks to the efforts of Arneach and other Native storytellers and preservers of culture, traditional Cherokee stories will certainly continue to thrive in their oral form, and with appropriate cultural context, into the coming generations.

Chapter 3

Orville Hicks: Traditional Blue Ridge Storyteller

Growing Up in the Mountains

Orville Hicks is a member of the renowned Beech Mountain Hicks-Harmon Jack Tale tradition of storytelling. Dozens of members of the Hicks and Harmon families "have for nine generations contributed both directly and indirectly to several important studies of American folklore" (Lightfoot 167). The patriarch of this family tradition is usually recognized as Council ("Counce") Harmon, who is Orville Hicks's great-grandfather. William Lightfoot writes that "many of Counce's progeny assimilated the old man's traditions and went on to become gifted performers" (368). Hicks is a wholly traditional storyteller who learned his stories in the traditional manner of face-to-face oral transmission, yet has chosen to share his tales with wider, nontraditional audiences over the last couple of decades. The two primary sources for his traditional tales were his mother, Sarah Harmon Hicks, and his cousin, Ray Hicks. Probably due to the large age difference between Orville and Ray, Orville refers to Ray as his "uncle," and this title for Ray Hicks will be used throughout this analysis to reflect Orville Hicks's view of Ray.

Carl Lindahl has written that "when 'civilization' entered the frontier...the settlers began readings novels and romances and stopped telling 'those ancient tales'" ("Storytelling Family" 4). Within the Hicks family, however, these old

stories have never ceased being told in the mountain homeland that this family has occupied for many generations. Hicks is an authentically traditional mountain storyteller, whose ancestors' "storytelling took root in these hills and hollows through at least six generations" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 3). However, he has successfully brought the traditional tales from their traditional context into more contemporary contexts through his programs in schools and appearances at various storytelling festivals and events. When Hicks shares his traditional stories at public events and interviews, he also provides background information about the stories and his native culture in which he learned them. In the new situational contexts of more public venues, Hicks himself creates a frame which recalls the older social contexts of family and community storytellings (Bauman 362). These recollections of "growing up in the mountains" have become the special context of two books written in collaboration with Julia Ebel.

Hicks grew up "in the Rominger community near Matney and Valle Mountain" in northwestern North Carolina (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 7). Julia Ebel describes the traditional mountain environment in which Hicks grew up: "Change bypassed numerous pockets of the country. Beech Mountain, North Carolina, and the hills and hollows surrounding it were among those places where change came slowly. This was the world in which Orville Hicks grew up" (*Orville Hicks* 1). In this traditional setting, "folks in the mountain community worked hard yet still had time to talk, visit, and swap tales" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 1). Hicks says, "Everywhere you go back then you got to hear a Jack Tale" (Class Interview 1/28/09). Thomas McGowan has written that "from his mother, neighbor Ray,

and an uncle, Adie Harmon, Orville learned his stories, but also developed a love of oral traditions and a special sense of the role of tradition bearer and oral performer in community contexts" ("Sort of Like" 165). Richard Bauman has written that "the family as a social base of folklore is just beginning to receive attention, while the community, representing the social matrix within which much of folklore is learned, used, and passed on, has been largely overlooked" (365). The Beech Mountain Jack Tale tradition has been passed down through the Hicks-Harmon family for several generations, and the family unit is what has sustained it.

The Role of Orville's Mother

As Julia Ebel writes, "high in a mountain hollow, a mother told stories to her children as they worked together in the garden and as they gathered herbs in the woods. Orville Hicks heard his mother's stories again and again until he learned them by heart" (*Orville Hicks* 1). Hicks says, "Most of my tales I learned from listening to Mama. She was a great storyteller" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 11). His mother "taught him around fifty stories, about half of them Jack tales" (Lightfoot 368). Sarah Harmon Hicks used the stories as incentives to get her children to complete daily tasks and to work faster. Sarah Hicks's use of stories places her in a larger Hicks-Harmon tradition: "Parents and grandparents got more work from the children when telling them stories" (Lindahl, "Storytelling Family" 6). Orville talks about how she told the children stories while they churned butter: "We had a wood churn, and we all liked to churn butter. We took

turns...and [Mama'd] tell us a tale while she did it" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 32).

Other traditional Appalachian storytellers say that they learned their tales from older family members as incentives to work harder. Richard Chase writes that storytelling served a very practical function in mountain families: "That of 'keeping the kids on the job' for such communal tasks as stringing beans for canning, or threading them up to make the dried pods" (*The Jack Tales* ix).

Similarly, in her sessions recording at the Library of Congress in 1947, Maud Gentry Long recalled that while all the children in her family were busy with communal tasks, "to keep our eyes open and our fingers busy and our hearts merry, my mother would tell these marvelous tales, the Jack, Will and Tom Tales" (Ellis 94). Listening to the stories kept mountain children both entertained and distracted from the tediousness of the task at hand, while all the while they were completing these tasks.

Other common settings for Sarah Hicks's telling tales were bean-snapping or herb-bunching. Ebel describes Orville's recalling these situational contexts: "Mama and the children sat on the porch or in the sitting room. They shelled beans and peas, snapped beans, or bunched galax...As she and the children worked, Mama told her stories" (*Orville Hicks* 63). Also, "Mama sang ballads and told stories as she hoed the rows of corn in the garden. Orville would work fast, trying to stay close enough to hear her. Mama knew Orville was trying to keep up, and she used her stories and songs to encourage him to work" (*Orville Hicks* 65). Hicks says, "she'd be howing a big old row of corn or a big old row of cabbage, Mama would look back and see us young'ns and if we was slow she'd

start telling a tale" (Class Interview 2/18/09). Over the years, "the voices of storytellers have eased work, warmed cold nights, and strengthened family ties" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 3). What is more, Sarah Harmon Hicks entertained her children with the stories she told because the Hicks family kept few books in the house, had no television, and rarely saw movies. In this way, she "nourished her family with stories. She had learned the stories from her father and grandfather and from her older brothers" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 11).

Hicks's mother had wide repertoire of stories from which he learned his own body of stories. She told several traditional tales, though "'Gallymander,' a tale of stolen coins, was her favorite" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 65). Richard Chase credits Sarah Harmon as one of his informants for "Gallymaders" in his *Grandfather Tales* (234). Sarah Harmon Hicks also told Jack Tales, such as "Old Fire Dragon," "Big Jack and Little Jack," "Soldier Jack," and "Jack and the Robbers." She also told ghost stories, local stories about places such as "Old Tough Road, and also traditional stories such as 'I Want My Big Toe' and 'Sop, Doll, Sop'" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 65).

The Beech Mountain Tradition Continued

Carl Lindahl has written about the changing nature of märchen and their development in the Hicks-Harmon tradition:

Something had slowly but clearly happened between 1765 and 1923: what had been a popular and public art form spanning the range of social classes and situations was now (at least in the

context of the Hicks-Harmon family tradition) a *working-class* act, inextricably associated with the hard luck and labor of the mountain poor. ("Shy Tradition" 75)

When these traditional mountain tales were being circulated in the area many generations ago, they were more widespread and undoubtedly told by many different family and community groups. Over the years, many families sacrificed this tradition in exchange for the more modern sources of entertainment.

However, the Hicks-Harmon extended family of the Beech Mountain area in western North Carolina was one of the few families who have preserved this tradition into the modern age. With this preservation, the tales have been passed down to Orville Hicks, who has, in turn, taken these tales back to a renewed role as a more "popular and public art." Thus, the *märchen* has gone from being a public art, to a more private art contained within one large family, and back to being a public art, thanks to the performances of modern traditional tellers like Orville Hicks.

As a husband and father, Hicks continued the family tradition of storytelling in the 1960s and '70s with his five sons each night before bed, when he would tell a tale or two to them. He says, "Sometimes I'd end up telling three or four tales before they'd go to sleep" (Class Interview 2/18/09). As Margaret MacDonald has written, storytellers' "real audience is their own family" (195). Joe, one of Hicks's sons, was especially fond of his father personalizing the stories: "Joe especially enjoyed Orville's personal adaptations of the stories. 'Put

me doing it,' Joe would say, so Orville replaced a character's name with Joe's" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 91).

Hicks's sons also grew up hearing the traditional tales from the person from whom he had learned them: his mother. One annual tradition among the family was visiting Sarah Harmon Hicks on her birthday, Halloween, and her telling the boys a short tale during the course of their trick-or-treating route through the mountains. Sadly,

At the time of Sarah Hicks's death in 1986, Orville had not yet told his first story before an audience. Sarah never knew the legacy that would follow her through Orville, her eleventh child, who had learned her stories over beans, galax, and rows of corn. (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 93)

Sarah Harmon Hicks certainly would have been surprised to find out that her youngest son ended up earning part of his living sharing the tales that he learned from her growing up. Another female Jack Tale teller, Jane Gentry, whose stories were collected by scholars "expressed utter astonishment that any outsider would want to know these stories" (Lindahl, "Shy Tradition" 73). Surely, Sarah Hicks's feelings towards sharing her family's stories in large public context would have been similar.

A Storytelling Neighbor: Ray Hicks

"Many kinfolk lived nearby" Orville's family growing up (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 7). For Hicks, "life centered on family. Playmates, work companions, and

role models came from family, and family introduced Orville to stores" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 9). In addition to his mother, another family member from whom Orville Hicks learned his Jack Tales and other traditional mountain tales was his uncle Ray Hicks, whom Orville called "the master of the storytellers" (Hicks, *Mule Egg Seller*). Ray Hicks exercised a very large and lasting impact

on the American storytelling revival, on the extended adventures of the hero Jack in his performances, and the development of that figure in the work of other writers and artists, and on ideas of Appalachian living and manhood generated in scholarly and popular discourse. (McGowan "Memorializing" 9)

Orville heard stories from Ray over the years in many different settings, one of the most constant being while Ray was cutting his hair: "He cut my hair...for forty years. He'd tell you a tale while he was cuttin' your hair and next thing you know he cut you nearly baldheaded. He get to telling a tale, to cuttin' away, to talkin', hair flyin' every which way" (Class Interview 1/28/09). Thomas McGowan corroborates Ray Hicks's use of everyday contexts for his storytelling: "He practiced other, more local, practical crafts in autorepair and haircutting, but even those practices took on a kind of legendary existence" ("Memorializing" 9).

Another common traditional context in which Orville heard stories from Ray was at Ray and his wife Rosa's home, whom he regards as a "second mom and dad." Orville says, "I get to feelin' little lonely or sad, why I just go up to see Ray and Rosa, my second mom and dad" (*Mule Egg Seller*). Orville continues, "I've heard a lot of stories in that house, many a night, in the wintertime. Sittin'

there, playin' old card games, Setback—we'd play and Ray would tell tales and we'd swap tales" (Class Interview 1/28/09). Orville discusses the context of Ray and Rosa's home in his "Ballad of Ray Hicks": "You can go to his house, He'll say, 'Come on in.' ...He'll play his harp and tell you a tale...Before you knowed hit, been up at Ray Hicks's all day long" (*Mule Egg Seller*). As a boy Orville loved listening to Ray telling stories with other family members. Orville recalls, "When Ray told a story, he'd look right straight at me, no matter how many other people were there—like he was telling the tale just to me" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 54). On a regular basis while growing up, Orville "joined cousins Ted and Leonard at Ray and Rosa's home as Ray masterfully led them through adventures with Jack" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 67). Ted, Ray's son, has said that when Orville arrived at the family's home, Ray would recognize Orville as a worthy successor, saying, "You'll be the one" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 91). Ebel observes, "Ray recognized Orville as the torchbearer, the one who would continue to share the tales beyond the community" (*Orville Hicks* 3).

Ray Hicks was considered the most prominent Jack Tale teller by many scholars and aspiring tellers, and was a special presence at the National Storytelling Festival each year in Jonesborough, Tennessee, the very embodiment of the storytelling revival. Even among the very trappings of the storytelling revival, Ray stayed true to his traditional mountain roots. Bruce Watson has written that "those who worry about commercialization would do well to listen to Ray Hicks" (65). Joseph Sobol describes an enlightening experience visiting Ray

one day, when he realized the skill of Ray to connect his different performance contexts:

The shock that followed, for me that morning, was the visceral realization that this milieu—Ray's parlor with his wife and his nephew and whosoever happened by—was the real source and home place of Ray's art. The stage at Jonesborough was for him, at best, a translation, an explosion of the natural intimacy and at-homeness of his stories into a gigantic artificial frame, which was only borne and transcended year after year through a leap of faith and love on Ray's part and on the part of his audience. ("Ray Hicks" 4)

Ray Hicks's natural storytelling environment was certainly his home environment with his family and close friends, but he was able to transfer his stories from this context to the festival stage. Even though the context of the festival stage is an "artificial" one, Ray Hicks was able to skillfully transfer the "natural intimacy and at-homeness" to this environment so that his audience can be magically transported, at least for an hour or so, to his mountain home.

Carl Lindahl writes about the rather fitting situation surrounding Jonesborough and the National Storytelling Festival:

Not surprisingly, Richard Chase sought recognition as the founder and grand old man of the new storytelling movement, but in one of the healthiest ironies of this curious history, the festival organizers and the professional storytelling community at large instead chose

Ray Hicks as their icon...With Ray Hicks in the limelight, the Hicks-Harmon family effected a sweet revenge on Chase and finally began to emerge from his shadow. ("Master" 24)

The National Endowment for the Arts recognized Ray as a national treasure, awarding him a National Heritage Fellowship in 1983. Ray himself shared the Jack Tales with the wider world outside his mountain community, but it would be Orville who would be the next generation of Jack Tale teller. As Thomas McGowan wrote in the obituary of Ray Hicks published in *Folklore in the Carolinas*, "the stories Ray told...continue in the performances of another generation of Hicks-Harmon storytellers, most notably Orville Hicks and Frank Proffitt, Jr." (9).

As they were growing up, Hicks also brought his sons to the home of his other storytelling mentor, Ray Hicks. While they were there, Orville took his turn sharing tales also, which always solicited a positive response from Ray: "'Gawd!' Ray would say. 'You're good.' The tales were familiar to Ray, but still, he would get tickled as he heard Orville's yarn-spinning" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 93). Orville says that Ray and Rosa's house is where he "got started storytellin' 'cause I was ashamed and wouldn't tell nobody else, so I ended up telling to Ray and Rosa" (Class Interview 1/28/09). Margaret MacDonald shares a similar situation about the traditional storytellers with whom she worked closely during the course of her research: "The opportunity to practice storytelling in a reinforcing storytelling situation is necessary to the creation of a master teller" (195).

Orville's Public Career

Ray Hicks helped Orville tell his first story before a public audience at the Beech Mountain Folktale Festival, thus crossing the boundary between traditional and contemporary contexts for the first time:

Orville went to Ray's home on the day of the Beech Mountain Folktale Festival. "You go on. I'll come in a bit," Orville told the others. But in the quiet of the old mountain home, his shyness took over, and he lingered there away from the crowd. Later that day, Ray sent a friend back to the house to fetch Orville. Ray wanted Orville to help tell a ghost story. The invitation to tell a tale came as a surprise. Flattered but unsure, Orville headed to the festival. That night, with Ray's encouragement, Orville told his first tale before a public audience. (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 93, 95).

Once he overcame his initial shyness at sharing in a public context in front of unfamiliar people, Hicks realized people enjoyed his stories and that he had a gift and a mission in sharing them.

Ray continued to encourage Orville to share stories, and he did so. MacDonald argues that "only those tellers who have been gradually exposed to increasingly large audiences have moved into the realm of the platform teller and begun to perform at festivals" (195). When Hicks told stories, "he saw stories on the listeners' faces. Children's eyes lit up, and adults rocked with laughter. Their responses kept him telling stories over and over—each telling fresh as it came to a new audience" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 95). Hicks successfully transitioned from

telling in the traditional context to non-traditional contexts because he was able to tell each story “fresh” for each new audience that came to hear his stories. In this way, Hicks continued to bring his traditional verbal art alive for new audiences. For many years, “Orville, Ray, and Ray’s wife, Rosa, traveled together to storytelling events” throughout the Appalachian region (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 96). The sharing of their traditional mountain tales took them to places far beyond their mountain homes, and led them to share tales with many different sorts of audiences.

In performing for large-scale audiences, Orville is carrying on his family’s deep-rooted tradition of storytelling and ensuring that the next generation of eager listeners do hear the stories: “Where an oral tradition is carried on rigorously, it exists because tradition-bearers of this high level of talent naturally and confidently cross the boundary that separates passive knowledge from active performance” (Niles 177). Surely others in the Hicks family know the same tales that Orville Hicks does, but for one reason or another, they have chosen to not continuing the stories—even to their own family members in some cases. Hicks says that if his mother knew he was telling the traditional stories as a profession that she would probably say, “Well you mean they are paying you to tell them things?” (Class Interview 2/18/09). Sarah Hicks would certainly be surprised that her youngest son has taken up the tales as he has, and even that he now shares them in front of large audiences for money. Even Hicks himself says, “I never thought about doing it for a living, or nothing like that” (Class Interview 2/18/09).

Traditional Family Contexts Continued

Today in western Watauga County, "family story-swapping happens less frequently. Still, Orville and Ray's son Ted swap a few tales" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 113). With the passing of Ray Hicks, family storytelling does not happen as regularly, but some family members have carried on the tradition.

Unfortunately, none of Hicks's grown sons have shown an interest in carrying on the tales, but perhaps his granddaughter Jenny Lynn will. Of his grown sons not taking the interest in carrying on the storytelling tradition, Hicks says, "They just don't seem interested in telling them. They've got their own lives, I guess" (Class Interview 2/18/09). Jenny Lynn has shown great interest in Orville's storytelling. Orville recalls: "One day she called me and said 'Guess what, Grandpa! We've got show and tell at school, and I nominated you to come down and tell stories'" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 113). So Orville fulfilled her request and told the Jack Tale "Fill, Bowl, Fill," which is Jenny Lynn's favorite tale. Due to Jenny Lynn's interest in hearing him tell the tales, Hicks hopes that she will be the next generation of storytelling in the family, saying, "It'd be a shame if no one took up these tales" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 113). A similar feeling is shared by other traditional tellers. Chehalis Indian storyteller Curtis DuPuis's "children, who have heard the tales over and over, are expected to be able to share these tales when their time comes" (MacDonald 196). Even though Hicks might not have this same expectation for his own children, he hopes that at least some member of his family will carry on the stories into the coming generations. His mother taught him the tales, and she did not specifically tell or expect him to carry on the

tales, but Hicks took his own initiative to do so. Hopefully this will happen once again in the rising generation in the family. Even though Hicks tells his stories frequently in public performance contexts nowadays, he still has been sharing in the traditional setting, most recently with his second grandchild, Wayland. When Wayland was just eleven days old Orville says, "I told him 'The Three Pigs'" (Class Interview 2/11/09). Hicks certainly hopes that little Wayland will learn these stories as he grows up hearing his grandfather and will want to carry them on in the future.

In *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, William Lightfoot wrote that "aside from Ray Hicks, a superb storyteller and undisputed master of Jack-tale performances, the Hicks-Harmon traditions are being kept alive at the dawn of the twenty-first century by Frank Proffitt Jr. and Orville Hicks" (368). Even though many members of the Hicks-Harmon extended family surely know the traditional tales that were told for years by Ray Hicks, only a couple of members have chosen to consciously carry on and publicly tell the stories. Frank Proffitt, Jr. died in 2005; in fact, Orville co-wrote Frank Proffitt's obituary in *Folklore in the Carolinas*. Hicks and McGowan wrote that Proffitt's "storytelling contributed to perpetuation of the Jack Tales of his Hicks-Harmon ancestors" (6). Proffitt imitated "the style of Ray Hicks" in his telling of "Jack and the Old Rich Man" and was "one of the best imitators of his uncle Ray Hicks" (Hicks and McGowan). Hicks and McGowan write that Proffitt's "private performances made us laugh heartily with his impersonating Ray's drawl and expressions" (7).

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With the passing of Ray Hicks and Frank Proffitt, Jr., Orville Hicks is now one of the contemporary generation of Jack Tale tellers.

Orville Hicks's Stories

Orville Hicks's repertoire contains a wide range of tales that he shares readily with many different types of audiences: "Jack Tales, other traditional tales, and slices of life from the North Carolina mountains" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 1). He says, "If something interests me, a tale or something, I can remember it and change it a little" (Class Interview 2/11/09). Another type of story that Hicks readily tells is personal experience narratives, and he admits, "I tell some about my wife, some about my boys" (Class Interview 2/18/09). Hicks tells personal experience narratives in some personal contexts: "First-person stories are based on whatever an individual considers important or entertaining enough to relate. Southern regional identity will partially determine the aspects of a person's life that are worth telling stories about, but these narratives also relate to American culture and to universal human concerns" (Mullen 483).

One genre of performance pieces that Hicks looks to add to his repertoire are jokes, which he picks up from people throughout his life. One of the main places in which he heard jokes to add to his repertoire was his job at the Aho Recycling Center between Boone and Blowing Rock, North Carolina. He says, "I picked up a lot of jokes over the years working seventeen years up there at the recycling [center]" (Class Interview 2/18/09). Jokes often belong to a certain culture or at least have been personalized by specific groups of people. In this

way, “if a teller hears a good tale from another culture, his storytelling instinct may well be to add that tale to his repertoire” (MacDonald 203). Hicks does not see a problem with adding jokes and other short anecdotes that he hears from people outside his native culture as long as he finds some resonance with them.

Despite this wide range of tales available to tell at any time, Hicks is most known for the Jack Tales and they are the closest to his heart: “I love the Jack Tales so good. My uncle [Ray Hicks] would tell them—I’d just sit there and remembered it” (Class Interview 2/11/09). Though Hicks says he enjoys all of the Jack Tales he heard from his family members, his favorite is “Jack and the Heifer’s Hide” (Class Interview 2/11/09). Jack Tales are a tale genre that include the widely known “Jack and the Beanstalk” story, but also include many other stories that feature the lovable character Jack. Jack Tales are a part of the larger body of European folklore known as *märchen*. Many claim that “the Märchen...is one of the few folk forms worthy of that otherwise oxymoronic appellation ‘oral art’” (Lindahl, “Shy Tradition” 69). Charlotte Guterrez writes that “few people outside the southern Appalachians realize that the Jack of ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’ is also the hero of dozens of other wonder stories” (147). Jack Tales are “English-language fairytales, most likely of Scots-Irish origin, [that] are concentrated in the southern Appalachian and Ozark mountains” that have been preserved by “North Carolina’s Ward-Harmon-Hicks family” (Burrison 1188). When the ancestors of the Hicks-Harmon family “emigrated from Europe, they brought with them a body of *märchen*, or magic tales, that they nurtured from generation to generation with at least as much care as they devoted to their most

important material possessions” (Lindahl, “Storytelling Family” 1). These tales have maintained

Traces of Old World fantasy...[including] fire-breathing dragons, unicorns, giants, and magical gifts. But they also reflect American democracy, with Jack ‘hollering out’ the king from his house, and incorporate such features of mountain folklife as log cabins and baskets of woven splits. (Burrison 1188)

In this way, the early mountain settlers kept sharing the traditional stories that they had brought with them from Europe, while at the same time, adding typically American mountain elements that firmly rooted the Jack Tales as an American tradition.

For Hicks, “the stories offered can-do messages as the underdog Jack outwitted kings, beasts, tricksters, and crafty brothers” (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 65). Furthermore, “the sense of being filled and empowered by the example of Jack is naturally amplified by the experience of transmitting—by the power to embody the stories” (Sobol, “Ray Hicks” 5). The origin of Jack Tales in the North Carolina mountains is not entirely clear, although Julia Taylor Ebel has made some speculations:

The origin of mountain Jack Tales and other traditional tales is a mystery. [Orville’s great-great-great-grandfather] Cutliff [Harmon] or his neighbor Samuel Hix, later Hicks, in Valle Crucis probably told the first Jack Tales in the area. They may have learned the tales from English or German ancestors or from other

early settlers who had brought the stories from Europe. (*Orville Hicks* 11)

Some Jack Tales that Orville has learned from his Beech Mountain family include “Jack and Heifer’s Hide,” “Big Jack and Little Jack,” and “Jack and the Varmints” (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 3). He also tells “folktales, such as ‘Catskins,’ ‘Gallymander,’ and ‘Soap, Soap, Soap,’ [that] feature other characters and have been called ‘Jack Tales for girls’” (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 3). Though he learned these tales in a traditional context, Hicks has taken them far beyond his home community and shared them with people from many walks of life. As Carl Lindahl has written, “the magic of the Märchen in its seeming ability to transcend both the identity of the teller and the language in which it was conveyed” (“Shy Tradition” 69-70). Hicks connects with his audiences because the themes and plots in the stories that he tells are relatable and compelling for all people.

Another type of story that is regularly told in the mountain community in which Hicks grew up is ghost stories. Julia Taylor Ebel explains their place in the corpus of stories: “Ghost stories abounded in the hills and hollows around Beech Mountain. Many tales evolved from unexplained happenings, but others were traditional tales. Ghost tales not only entertained but also served as words of caution for children” (*Orville Hicks* 55). Hicks has picked up some of these tales and “nowadays, eerie beasts and ghostly happenings leap and creep through Orville’s stories—reflections of a mountain childhood filled with mystery” (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 56).

Orville Hicks on Storytelling Style and His Contextualizing

Julia Ebel observes Orville's ideas about the natural way in which stories must come through the teller's voice: "He simply picks his stories as he goes along, letting one story flow into another as only a master storyteller could. [He claims,] 'I ain't never in my life sat down and planned what stories I was going to tell'" (*Orville Hicks* 111). Hicks pays attention to the reactions and needs of each particular audience in order to choose the stories from his repertoire that would be best in that context. Hicks's ample supply of stories can be likened to the ample supply of food that his mother kept in the family's cellar when he was growing up: "Mama stocked her cellar with potatoes and jars of beans, but Orville kept a stock of stories. With his harvest of tales at hand, Orville fits his stories to the situation" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 111). Sandra Stahl has written that "it is to the teller's advantage to appear unselfconscious in the telling; the technique of simulating spontaneous form lends an air of sincerity and immediacy to the storytelling, qualities that might be undermined by an extremely polished performance" (272). While Hicks says that he does not plan what stories he is going to tell at any certain venue and thus his performances are spontaneous in this way, he has been telling his stories for many years so that they are fairly well formularized and usually do not differ too much from one performance context to the next. Part of Hicks's charm as a storyteller is that he is so in tune with the needs and desires of any particular audience that he is able to seemingly choose the perfect story for that audience, without much premeditation on his part. This personalization of the storytelling performance is appealing to any storytelling

audience and shows Hicks's attentiveness to the needs of each particular audience.

One of the main ways in which Hicks personalizes his Jack Tales is that he frames them with a personal narrative about the traditional context in which he learned the tale. For example, he might talk about how he learned tales from his mother while shelling beans or working in the garden. Orville talks about how he learned tales from Ray Hicks when he visited Ray and his wife Rosa, or when he was getting his hair cut by Ray. Orville describes these traditional storytelling contexts in such a way that he transports his nontraditional audiences back to those settings so that they can listen to and enjoy the traditional stories in much the same way as Hicks did as a child. The tales carry special meaning for Orville not only for the content of the stories themselves, but also for the special contexts in which he learned the tales and the fond connotations those carry. In his modern storytelling performances, Hicks skillfully gives his audience at least a glimpse of mountain life and what it was like for him growing up in a traditional storytelling culture and learning these tales.

Talking about operating within the newer, non-traditional performance contexts Hicks says, "I used to get whipped for telling lies. Now I get paid for it. I never thought I'd be traveling and doing this storytelling for a living" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 109). These newer performance contexts of schools and festivals allow Hicks to make a living at doing something he loves and is a part of his mountain heritage. A local setting for his storytelling is the program of storytelling and music at the Todd General Store in nearby Ashe County.

Regardless of the audience for which Hicks is performing, “he begins with a casual greeting and the same neighborly tone he would use in a school or in the cozy setting of the Todd General Store near his home. His tales hold listeners of all ages spellbound” (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 110). The effectiveness of Hicks’s performances come from his ease of performing in any sort of venue—be it more formal or more casual, traditional or contemporary.

Hicks can be likened to storyteller Donald Davis, who has also taken his traditional art to non-traditional contexts, though Davis has been more closely involved with the storytelling revival proper than Hicks. Davis “has adapted [his tradition] to contexts that carry few of folklorists’ cherished earmarks of tradition” (Sobol, “Between” 205). Though Hicks has taken his traditional stories out of their traditional contexts, the stories are still wholly traditional themselves, and he is more than willing to share them with new audiences. Hicks is similar to Davis in terms of creativity and transport of tradition, though perhaps to a lesser degree. The following statement describes Davis but could also describe Hicks: “Donald Davis is no custodian of antiquated relics, but a creative artist from a folk tradition who has moved beyond the boundaries of his local group” (Sobol, “Between” 206). Hicks recognizes the importance of preserving historical traditions, but at the same time, he ensures that the tales are passed down through the future generations by making small changes that engage his modern audience. Hicks speaks of the necessity of sharing his traditional tales with children, from both within and without the region: “I think the younger generation needs to know how folks lived here in the mountains.” As Julia Ebel concludes, Hicks especially

likes to “see the kids’ faces, to see their delight in the twists and turns of his stories” (*Orville Hicks* 110).

Even though Hicks is a sought-after mountain storyteller throughout the region, he much prefers to tell his stories close to home and not have to travel long distances. In fact, he says, “I like telling stories, but I don’t like the travel” (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 110). However, one storytelling performance took him hundreds of miles to the national capital:

In June of 2003, a trip to the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival in Washington, D.C., allowed him to tell stories on the National Mall alongside cousin Frank Proffitt, Jr., who sang ballads there.

Orville was grateful for the experience but glad to plant his feet back on the familiar soil of Watauga County, North Carolina.

(Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 110)

One of most interesting performance contexts in which Hicks has told stories regularly over the years was his job at the Aho Recycling Center. Beyond being an important new performance context for only Orville Hicks, Thomas McGowan writes, “the Aho Road Recycling site—was an important new development for the Hicks-Harmon traditions” (“Sort of Like” 168). The Center was a familiar setting for telling tales. Orville insists, “[It was] kind of like a second home to me. I went there; I felt like I was going to a second home” (Class Interview 2/18/09). Hicks said about telling at the recycling center, “Somebody stopped and wanted to hear a tale, I’d tell them one, or hear a tale from them” (Class Interview 2/18/09). Although this performance context was most certainly

nontraditional, Hicks engaged in the traditional practice of “swapping” tales with people there; that is, both telling and hearing tales. In this way, the recycling center context was much more akin to the traditional family contexts in which Hicks learned his tales due to the intimate nature of the interactions, knowing the participants personally, and the act of swapping tales back and forth. Julia Ebel describes this interesting performance context of Hicks:

Orville has worked for Watauga County as manager of the recycling and container site at Aho. There he enjoys conversation with those who pass. At his work site, Orville built a “liar’s bench” from salvaged wood. Folks come by to rest on the rustic bench as they swap yarns. Tour buses have even stopped by the recycling site, just so visitors can meet Orville and hear a quick tale. (*Orville Hicks* 121)

The fact that Hicks made even his place of employment a context for sharing tales with a wide audience showed his dexterity as a teller and the reputation he has garnered in the area as a great teller.

Hicks used great discretion in choosing when and how to share tales while on the job, but he said, “the county kind of got onto me a couple times, said I was blocking traffic, telling tales. They didn’t like it too good” (Class Interview 2/18/09). Even though the management may have been concerned about Hicks’s storytelling at the recycling center, the public could not be kept away from hearing his famed stories. Even tourists coming from out of town who had heard about Hicks’s famous tales somehow found out where he worked and came to the

Aho center in order to hear his stories. Orville shares one of his memorable experiences he had telling stories at the Aho Recycling Center: "They brought a tour bus up there one time and stopped, got me telling my tale. All the people got out and lined up against the dumpsters. In the summertime, flies were blowing out of there" (Class Interview 2/18/09). Word of Hicks's engaging mountain storytelling has spread far and wide, and many people visiting the area for only a short time have made sure to include one of his performances on their tour of the area.

After working for seventeen years at the Aho Recycling Center, Hicks left his job there to begin telling stories on a full-time basis. He explains: "I kind of got busy in the storytelling. I had to give up my storytelling or quit work. Figured I'd rather get paid to run my mouth than work. I had to give one of them up" (Class Interview 2/18/09). Hicks says that he does miss sharing at the Center, but not the work itself: "[I] miss the setting, miss the people, but I don't miss the dump site. After seventeen years of smelling the garbage, looking at it" (Class Interview 2/18/09).

Since going full-time with his storytelling, one of the most frequent venues in which Hicks tells his tales are schools, somewhat ironic due to the fact that Orville tried to avoid school as a boy: "Orville laughs at the fact that he now goes to school to tell his stories. The mountain speech of his upbringing, once a subject of taunting at school, now serves him well as it gives color and authenticity to the tales of his life" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 105). Audiences in such new performance contexts are welcoming to Orville due to his mountain dialect

and colorful stories about growing up in the area that has shaped his views of the world. He sometimes makes changes in his traditional tales for new audiences: "While Orville learned the stories of earlier generations, experience offers fodder for new and adapted tales" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 105). When telling stories for school audiences, teachers and administrators have often been surprised by how much attention the children pay to Hicks and his mountain tales. Orville remembers one occasion, a teacher at a school for troubled children, told him, "I can't believe this. We're going to have to hire you to work here" (Class Interview 2/18/09).

Hicks is aware of censoring issues that directly affect his telling the traditional mountain tales in public schools. In regards to the tale "Wicked John," he says, "Now that tale, they wouldn't let you tell it in the schools back in the '40s and '50s and '60s on account of the devil and stuff. But now they ask you to tell it in the schools" (Class Interview 3/4/09). Today, school administrators seem to be more accepting of the traditional tales in their original oral forms and permit such tales to be told in order to share the traditions of a specific area. During his storytelling performances in schools over the years, Hicks has had to deal with some situations unique to dealing with children in this performance context. He says, "When I tell I like to tell with kids. I like to see what some of them come up and say, what they come up with" (Class Interview 2/11/09).

Hicks has had some interesting encounters with quick-tongued children audience members over the years that have caused him to be quick on his feet and adaptable to these new performance contexts. One time while telling the story

“Hardy Hardhead,” Hicks forgot to introduce the character Runwell in the proper place in the story and later suddenly brought Runwell into the events of the story. A little boy said, “Wait a minute, wait a minute, where did Runwell come from?” Hicks thought quickly and improvised by saying, “Shh, don’t tell nobody. The witch had him...he’s a secret” (Class Interview 2/11/09). Hicks incorporated details about the story in his explanation for the sudden appearance of Runwell, and this seemed to satisfy the curiosity of the boy. Another situation in which Hicks had to deal with the surprises inherent to performing in the context of a children audience was a different telling of “Hardy Hardhead” in which he was describing the old witch in the tale as ugly. At this point, he recalls, “A little girl looked up and said, ‘Well, you’re ugly’” (Class Interview 2/11/09). Hicks was not fazed by this comment, and continued telling the story after everyone in attendance—including Hicks himself—shared a good laugh. Hicks’s ability to think quickly and adjust to these circumstances makes him adaptable to these new contexts and able to perform in many situations.

Hicks speaks of the importance of connecting with his audience, no matter how small during a performance: “I pick me out two or three people to look at and talk to...no matter how many people are there. When I made that CD over in Boone, they put me in a little room by myself to tell stories. There was a fly on the wall, so I just told to it” (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 110). Such CD recordings “cut in a studio lack the social interaction that distinguishes genuine storytelling events” (Nicolaisen 161). But even in these newer contexts, Hicks is able to

engage the prospective listener of his CD recordings because he is adept at telling in so many different performance contexts.

Hicks's signature tale is a traditional story called "Mule Eggs," in which the mountaineer main character snookers a "city slicker" into paying a high price for pumpkins, telling the city slicker all the while that they are "mule eggs." The tale "established [Orville] as a trickster particularly adept at playing with language and manipulating outsiders of different class and non-local origin" (McGowan, "Sort of Like" 166). Because he has told this story so many times in many different performance contexts, he tells it very close to the same each time. The one change that he consciously makes in "Mule Eggs" has to do with audience participants, and involves poking fun at a prominent person in the audience by saying that the city slicker looked "sorta like" him. In this way, a traditional storyteller "is more than a preserver of traditional material; he is also a creator in that he brings his own interests, values, and personality into his tale-telling" (Guitierrez 150). Traditional tellers know that by making small changes to the tales that they have learned and share, they are in fact helping to preserve them into the future and to maintain interest and freshness of the stories. Hicks made a change in "Mule Eggs" in a specific way when he told the tale at the opening of the North Carolina Museum of History in 1995: "For a performance at the festival opening of the N.C. Museum of History with Governor Jim Hunt in the audience, Orville said the Cadillac driver 'was sorta dressed like a governor'" (McGowan, "Sort of Like" 166). This insertion of a playful detail about one of the characters in his signature tale allows Hicks to better connect with any

audience to which he is telling. Even though he often does not know any of the audience members individually, he will at least have some concept of the demographics of the audience and perhaps know one or two people that he can pull in as the butt of his jokes in this tale.

Hicks addresses the issue of story choice for different audiences: "I don't change them, but I use some different tales. Like 'Jack and the Robber' is more for youngsters and there's a lot of tales—they put in the *Grandfather Tales* book like 'Catskin'—and they call 'em Jack Tales for girls" (Class Interview 1/28/09). While he does not feel like he can actually change the story plots that he has received through his family tradition, Hicks does use discretion when choosing which particular tales to tell for which audiences.

Hicks says that he is not aware of the gestures and physical movements he makes while telling tales, saying that after a performance of his was recorded, "I watched a video of myself and—my wife—I told her to turn it off...I said, 'That thing's a'lyin''" (Class Interview 1/28/09). He says, "I was telling tales and I was twiddling my thumbs and [would] take my hat off and rub my head and I do all of this, and I watched it on video and I couldn't believe it" (Class Interview 1/28/09). These things that Hicks does during his performances are completely unconscious, and stylized gestures are not a big part of his performances.

One of the key ways in which Hicks brings the traditional context in which he learned his tales to contemporary audiences is by adding metanarration before he starts his stories, allowing the hearer to be taken back to his childhood home near Beech Mountain. In this way, "Orville's [childhood] home provides

the setting for many of his stories" (Ebel, *Orville Hicks* 27). Hicks skillfully transports his modern audience back to the porch, garden, and home in which he learned the stories from his mother Sarah Harmon Hicks and from his uncle, Ray Hicks. Thomas McGowan writes about this special metanarration:

Important parts of Orville's presentation of self are his origins in the mountains and his open sharing of personal information with the audience. These are key elements in his performances that prove tremendously attractive to audiences both young and old, insider and outsider. ("Sort of Like" 165)

Donald Davis uses a similar technique in his storytelling performances: "What would be implicitly shared by a backporch storyteller and his ingroup listeners, Davis must make explicit in his performances for mixed and anonymous concert audiences" (Sobol, "Between" 209). When Hicks does this, he is "trying to account for [the] natural contexts" that have been lost in this more modern age in which his listeners live (Bauman 366). Hicks feels that it is important that his listeners feel the same connection to these stories as he does, and that they understand the special context in which he learned them. Joseph Sobol writes about this same phenomenon happening in the storytelling performances of teller Donald Davis: "It is just this dual point of view, of Davis the narrator and Davis the child-character in the stories, that gives them much of their poignancy and power" ("Between" 209). During a performance, Hicks transports his modern audiences back to his childhood when he learned his stories, thus forging the important connection between the stories and their traditional family roots. For

this reason, he adds metanarration to each performance that he does in order to set the scene for his storytelling.

Hicks learned the tale of "Big Jack and Little Jack" from his uncle Addie Harmon, who used to introduce the tale by saying, "Now this tale would be what the old people called 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' And you'll know why if I tell the tale" (Class Interview 1/28/09). When Hicks tells this tale for audiences today, he acknowledges the source of the tale, saying, "I'm going to tell you a tale here from my uncle. Used to tell this tale once from the store way back up there in the mountain." This "store" to which Hicks refers is the store that Addie Harmon, Sarah Harmon Hicks's brother, owned. Hicks will proceed to share with the audience what his uncle Addie used to tell him about the meaning of the story (Class Interview 1/28/09). In this way, nontraditional audiences receive both a connection to Hicks's origins of this story as well as an explanation of how the mountain people who told this traditional story viewed its moral content. Hicks visited the store or Harmon's house in order to hear his tales. Hicks describes the context in which Harmon shared his tales:

I'd go up to his house and he'd be sittin' on the porch there and he'd spit chewin' tobacco juice across the porch about ten foot. "Come to hear a tale, young'n?" I'd say, "Yeah." And he'd make you work, said, "Get a little water in and help me cut some wood and I'll tell you a tale." He'd tell about half of a Jack Tale, said, "Come back next Friday and I'll finish it." And I'd end up going back next Friday and working and hearing the tale again. I heard it

a million times, but I just liked the way he told it. (Class Interview 1/28/09)

Hicks compares hearing the same tales over and over again from the same family teller to watching an episode of a favorite television program over and over: "I watch Andy Griffith a hundred times and still like the same episodes...I can hear [Jack Tales] a hundred times and still like 'em. They're as good the first time I heard 'em as the last time" (Class Interview 1/28/09). This metanarration gives the audience a concrete idea of the context in which Hicks learned his tales, as well as a preview of the type of tale he is going to tell and the past purpose of its telling. In the traditional context, the tale of "Big Jack and Little Jack" was used as a teaching tale that contains Old Testament-like themes. In the newer contexts in which Hicks tells his tales today, these stories are primarily told for entertainment and thus this explanation is necessary to situate them within their native cultural context.

Hicks goes on to contextualize the characters in this specific tale within the larger body of Jack tales: "This tale's about Big Jack and Little Jack. Now Little Jack is the same Jack that's in these other Jack Tales, but another feller his name was Jack too; he was a pretty big feller. Him and Little Jack were buddies" (Class Interview 1/28/09). The listeners within the traditional context would have doubtlessly heard this same story many times and thus would know the identities of the characters in the tale, and such metanarration would not be necessary as it is in the newer performance contexts of Hicks. Before beginning the tale, Hicks wants his audience to understand who the characters in it are. Hicks ends the

telling of this tale by saying, "Now you know why they call it 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'" (Class Interview 1/28/09). This comment at the end of the tale reminds the audience of how the tale was used in the original context where the teller learned it, and nicely links back to the beginning of the tale, providing a demonstration of narrative unity.

Linking to the Past

When Hicks transports his modern audiences back to the mountain homeland in which he learned the story, he is making direct connections to his own memories: "We experience our present world in a context which is casually connected with past events and objects, and hence with reference to events and objects which we are not experiencing when we are experiencing the present" (Connerton 2). Another well-known storyteller who has the power to transport her audience back to another time and place is Kathryn Windham: "Onstage, grandmotherly in her patchwork skirt and bright red hat, she spoke as if the audience were on her back porch" (Watson 64). William Bascom has written that "the whole nature of the performance, the voice and mimicry, the stimulus and the response of the audience mean as much to the natives as the text" ("Four Functions" 335). Of course the individual stories themselves are important to Hicks and his cultural heritage, but the fact that he learned these stories from beloved family members is arguably more important. Truly, "the text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless" (Bascom, "Four Functions" 335). When he shares the stories with audiences of all kinds,

Hicks is transported back to his childhood helping his mother in the garden or the front porch of his uncle Ray Hicks's house hearing these tales. For traditional storytellers, there is an extra layer of meaning and significance within these tales; those from whom they learned the tales and the traditional contexts in which that took place.

These traditional mountain stories that Hicks shares with contemporary audiences are folklore and "folklore, like language, is a mirror of culture and incorporates descriptions of the details of ceremonies, institutions and technology, as well as the expression of beliefs and attitudes" (Bascom, "Four Functions" 337). When sharing with non-traditional audiences, native storytellers must situate the stories they tell within their own cultural context, which they do through metanarration and other background information, explanations for certain cultural characteristics found in the stories they tell, and unspoken indicators such as dress. Hicks's wardrobe never varies much from the typical denim overalls and baseball cap: "His costume is certainly an important part of his presentation of self: overalls and baseball caps always" (McGowan, "Sort of Like" 168). Hicks says that the only time he has really ever dressed up was for his son's wedding: "I wore blue jeans but I had my dress coat on with a white shirt or something...I didn't feel right" (Class Interview 2/18/09). Hicks's outfit seems typical of many people from the area, and thus his manner of dress only serves to amplify the traditionalism of his performances in large nontraditional public contexts.

Orville Hicks: Torchbearer of the Hicks-Harmon Jack Tale Tradition

Orville Hicks is a traditional Appalachian storyteller who has successfully ventured out into telling for larger non-traditional audiences. In order for his newer audiences to understand the stories and their traditional mountain context, Hicks adds metanarration before and sometimes after each story he tells. This metanarration helps his contemporary audiences to better connect with his stories and feel at least some of the appreciation and reverence he has for them. While Hicks has performed at many schools and festivals, the unique setting of his job at the Aho Recycling Center in Watauga County, North Carolina, afforded him a way in which to share his tales with not only his fellow workers, but also hordes of tourists that visit the area and have heard about his famed stories. Orville was selected by his storytelling mentor Ray Hicks early on to be the torchbearer of the Beech Mountain Jack Tale tradition into the next century, and he is fulfilling this role better than even Ray could have anticipated.

Chapter 4

Connie Regan-Blake: Revivalist and Promoter of Traditionalism

Storytelling by Happenstance

Connie Regan-Blake has been an important player in the storytelling revival that has been happening during the past thirty-five years. She has held leadership positions within the National Association for the Perpetuation and Preservation of Storytelling (NAPPS) and its later formation, the National Storytelling Network, and was one of the first revivalist tellers to take the art of storytelling out into venues for wider audiences as her profession. Throughout her career, she has told at many elementary, middle, and high schools; professional conferences and meetings; and storytelling technique-building workshops. Regan-Blake has been most cooperative in helping me to develop this project and has been more than willing to share her insight into this storytelling world of which she has been such an integral part for so many years. What started out for her as a serendipitous job at the Chattanooga Public Library after completing her bachelor's degree in political science became a lifelong job as storyteller. Though she happened upon the storytelling community in a rather accidental manner, she has become a nationally- and even internationally-renowned professional storyteller who shares her traditional, literary, and personal experience, and created stories with a wide variety of audiences. Regan-Blake says, "I feel like I'm an ambassador in some ways" because she can help new

audiences outside the region overcome negative stereotypes about Appalachia and the South in general (Interview 9/16/09). Indeed, Regan-Blake has helped to spread traditional stories far beyond their mountain roots due to her participation in the storytelling revival.

Regan-Blake and the Storytelling Revival

Connie Regan-Blake is an Alabama native who got into storytelling when hired at the Chattanooga Public Library to work with her cousin Barbara Freeman as a librarian. Rather than by her own initial desire or confidence in storytelling, Regan-Blake came to be a storyteller by Freeman's insistence that she should establish storytelling activities as an extension of the Library's daycare center program. Regan-Blake relays that story: "Barbara said, 'I think you can do this.' [And I replied,] 'Whoa, what's a storyteller?' Storytelling, and I heard that word but I really didn't have a concept...So I went and applied for the job and I got it. And that began in October of '71, my lifelong career of storytelling" (Interview 3/24/09). The Chattanooga community soon embraced Regan-Blake as a storyteller, and eventually she began to be recognized as a skilled storyteller by regional and national audiences as well.

After quitting their jobs at the library, Regan-Blake and Freeman made up the storytelling duo the Folktellers and went on the road full time. For over twenty years, "the Folktellers shared their careers and styles of storytelling through educational workshops and videotapes" (Roberts 1262). In this way, Regan-Blake has told in a number of performance contexts over the years, from

folk arts festivals, to storytelling festivals, to professional conferences and events. Both Regan-Blake and her cousin Barbara Freeman “have played a major role in the storytelling festival movement, as leaders of NAPPS...and as the first emissaries from the emerging storytelling scene to enter the already established world of folk music festivals” (Sobol, *Journey* 79-80). In fact, Regan-Blake “was one of the first in American storytelling’s modern-day renaissance to turn her art into a full-time career and take it on the road” (Roberts 1262). The duo of Regan-Blake and Freeman attended some of the folk music festivals that were popular in the 1970s, and they decided to be a part of that movement and its lifestyle. Joseph Sobol writes:

By October of 1973, the cousins had already been to one folk music festival, the Folk Festival of the Smokies in Cosby, Tennessee. There, listening to the old-time music floating across the sward and walking among the tables of revival crafts—candles, pottery, dulcimers, sandals, all the nativistic iconography from sixty years of Appalachian folk revivalism fanned into new urgency by the back-to-the-land fervor of the late sixties—they both had a vivid but inchoate sense of calling. (*Journey* 79-80)

The festival encounter moved them to bring storytelling into the folk festival circuit, as well as to help to establish and popularize early storytelling festivals.

The Folktellers “took their storytelling programs to audiences across North America, gaining a wide popularity and inspiring many others to begin storytelling careers” (Roberts 1262). Regan-Blake says, “There weren’t festivals

like today until like 1985 or something. So for the first 15 years, I told at a lot of folk music festivals...That world just welcomed us in, and so we told at Vancouver Folk Festival, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Chicago Folk Festival, Philadelphia" (Interview 3/24/09). With the advent of professional storytelling associations and festivals, "both Freeman and Regan-Blake served on the first NAPPS board of directors, and Regan-Blake was chair of the board and director of its festival for many years in the seventies and eighties" (Sobol, *Journey* 79-80). Also, Regan-Blake "served as [NAPPS's] artistic director for nearly ten years" (Roberts 1262). Regan-Blake has been closely involved in the storytelling revival since its early days and thus has been a key player in the opening up of new performance contexts in which traditional stories are told. As MacDonald has written, "Our tellers all have found themselves cast in the role of master storyteller, not only by themselves, but by their communities" (195). The artistic community that made up the early storytelling circle in Jonesborough recognized Regan-Blake's talent as both a storyteller and ambassador of Appalachian culture, and thus she held leadership roles for NAPPS early on in its existence.

Joseph Sobol writes about the storytellers who became an integral part of the storytelling revival: "Beyond their professional affiliation, what unites these artists into a storytelling community is a shared sense that storytelling endows one with not just a job but a mission: it can revitalize individuals and the culture as a whole" (*Journey* 4). As a teller involved with the revival since its early days, Regan-Blake shares this "mission" of the importance of storytelling in its functions in everyday human life. Sobol goes on to write:

The storytelling festival became, for its most involved participants, a way of enacting a ritualized happy ending to the wonder tale of the storyteller's journey. For the teller on stage, the festival is a homecoming, a redemption, a wedding of teller to traditions and to an idealized community. (*Journey* 120-21)

For Regan-Blake, the establishment of the National Storytelling Festival and other related storytelling festivals represented a victory in terms of bringing the art and preservation of storytelling into the forefront of popular American consciousness. The literal "storyteller's journey" from its beginnings as only an act within folk arts festivals to having its own national festivals created the basis for the storytelling revival that took place in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Bruce Watson describes the rekindled interest in the art of storytelling: "TV told plenty of stories, all right, but it left little to the imagination. Eager for stories that can be seen on a mental screen, people are returning to the word. The [storytelling] revival began in the hills of Appalachia, where storytelling never really died out" (61). Similarly, John Niles comments:

The physical occasions of performance, with their special and powerful intimacies, both create and stir up memories that will not be forgotten. Televisions and movie theaters are not likely to do this so readily, whatever else they may provide. This is an important distinction and one that the culture industry seeks to hide. (61)

When a storyteller tells a story, he or she transports the audience into the land of the story, yet this setting is completely determined by the individual listener's perception and visualization of that scene. In the realm of movies, television, and other visual media, the images are already pre-set for the viewer and thus allow no room for creativity or personal interpretation. Regan-Blake shares this sentiment in her feelings about "scary" stories and movies:

I love ghost stories...there is really something about being scared and appropriately. It's interesting because I do not ever go to any scary movies. I am not that [into] Freddy Kruger, chopping things off, even though in stories I tell some where people chop things off. I don't like that vision, I don't like someone else deciding how it's going to look. (Interview 3/24/09)

Though Regan-Blake does tell scary stories at some of her performances, she feels that they are effective because all people like being scared—at least to a degree—and that each person can individually envision what they see as the scary story is much better than watching a scary movie.

Regan-Blake's Promotion of the Traditional

In the storytelling revival, contemporary tellers revive older traditional stories in new contemporary contexts. Joseph Sobol writes how revivalist storyteller Donald Davis "carries Jack out of a vanishing rural South and into the schools and auditoriums of cosmopolitan American communities" (Sobol, "Between" 206). In doing so, Davis's "work richly articulates the issues of

contemporary storytelling performance" (Sobol, "Davis" 206). Regan-Blake also has her part in preserving these traditional tales and in carrying them to newer mainstream American contexts: "I've always done schools. I've always done workshops. I've always had at least a foot in the corporate world, and done kind of some unusual things" (Interview 9/16/09). In sharing with schools outside of regions, such as Appalachia, in which storytelling is still taking place in traditional contexts in some cases, Regan-Blake is sharing tales with children who would otherwise not hear stories told in these oral narrative forms. In the storytelling workshops that she regularly conducts, Regan-Blake instructs people in how best to add stories to their own storytelling repertory, choose stories for a specific audience, and tell the stories. Throughout the course of these workshops, she tells traditional tales—either selectively or in their entirety—to illustrate different points that she is trying to make about the art of storytelling. Although this is an unusual performance context and oftentimes she tells truncated versions of the traditional stories she knows, Regan-Blake is still exposing new audiences to these traditional stories for perhaps the first time in many cases.

Regan-Blake feels integrating a sense of Appalachian culture with storytelling is an important connection. Most of the storytellers I interviewed concurred that people from outside the Appalachian culture do not fully understand the cultural and historical significance of storytelling in the region, but that these misunderstandings can often be remedied when the stories are situated in the appropriate context by the storyteller or event sponsor. Regan-Blake feels

that people coming into the region are receptive to the idea of storytelling, and can understand that storytelling may be for an adult audience:

If you kind of connect [Appalachian culture] with the idea of mountain music and storytelling, I think they get it. You know, they realize, "Oh yeah." As opposed to someone in their hotel lobby saying, "You wanna go hear some storytellers?" They might think, "Well, I don't know." But if it's framed in the context of [Appalachian culture, they get it]. (Interview 3/24/09)

When stories from any culture are appropriately situated within that culture and shared by tellers who respect the culture and its traditions, the stories are likely to be effectively conveyed to the audience.

Ray Hicks's Influence

After hearing about traditional mountain storyteller Ray Hicks's notoriety through her involvement with NAPPS and the National Storytelling Festival, Regan-Blake visited Ray's home "about four to five" times annually in order to learn tales from him and exchange news with his wife Rosa near Beech Mountain after meeting Ray in 1973 (Interview 9/16/09). In fact, Regan-Blake introduced Ray at the National Storytelling Festival every year he performed except for the first year. Regan-Blake is one of the "aspiring tellers" Sobol recognizes in the following passage: "Aspiring tellers, scholars, and enthusiasts from all over the English-speaking world have made the pilgrimage up the rocky road to Ray's house, their ears popping and their cars' suspension rattling, to bask for a while in

the light of that older world” (Sobol, “Ray Hicks” 3). Regan-Blake says, “I had, in a lot of ways, a very deep connection with Ray,” whom she considered “a friend, a real mentor,” and a teacher (Interview 9/16/09). She says that Ray “had an enormous influence on my life” (Interview 9/16/09). According to Regan-Blake, the relationship with Ray “was not a relationship like any other that I’ve ever had in my life” because she felt very close to Ray even though they did not exchange much personal information or news on a regular basis:

Ray, for so many years—really until he got sick—never chatted. He would ask, maybe, how my parents were or how [her husband] Phil was, but that was it...I think Ray really saw his role as a teacher and a storyteller, and he just did that from the moment you got there. You could maybe be able to squeeze in one little question but basically, as Rosa said, he was an all-day talker, and he would just go from there. (Interview 9/16/09)

Ray Hicks was a man who very much understood the role of tradition in his life and knew that it was his mission to perpetuate the stories into the future—both through his family and through relationships like the one he forged with Regan-Blake. Because Regan-Blake had met Ray through the storytelling community and the National Storytelling Festival, he knew that she had come to visit him to hear his stories, although she did deeply care for Ray as a person as well. She says, “I always felt...that he had a deep concern for me and my family” and that she and Ray did not really start chatting and getting to know each other on a more personal level until he became ill in 2001 (Interview 9/16/09).

When Ray became ill, Regan-Blake “would probably be going up there [to visit him] close to either once every month or once every two months...being a liaison between Ray and his adoring community” (Interview 9/16/09). Regan-Blake set up a fund to help out Ray and his family during this trying time, and she also had an e-mail distribution list of about four hundred people “that wanted to hear what was going on, how my latest visit was, and...a part of that was also the fundraising” (Interview 9/16/09). Though Regan-Blake had admired Ray as a storyteller for several decades, she began to grow even closer to him as a person when he became ill. It was at this point in their relationship that the conversations between Ray and Regan-Blake began to take on the more back-and-forth nature of usual friendships, in which friends take turns exchanging news and information about their personal lives. She says, “It was more in those last two years of his life that I feel like we got even closer” (Interview 9/16/09).

As far as storytelling goes, Ray taught Regan-Blake the traditional tales “Wicked John and the Devil” and “Big Jack, Little Jack.” Regan Blake says that she tells “a very close version to his ‘Jack and the Northwest Wind’” (Interview 9/16/09). Even though she did not learn the traditional Appalachian stories growing up, she learned and started telling these stories early in her career, so they seem to hold a special place in her repertoire. Regan-Blake says that, more than the actual specific stories that she heard from Ray over the years of their close friendship, she learned the importance of being truly “in the moment” of telling the story and fully attuned to the audience and their needs:

What I learned from him storytelling-wise—it wasn't necessarily the specific story. It was more about being present, about being so tuned into the listener and to the story that it was *really happening* right then. And that's always been my philosophy and way of telling but I think Ray probably [taught me this]. (Interview 9/16/09)

Even though the actual number of stories that Regan-Blake learned directly from Ray is not very large in comparison to her whole repertoire of a hundred-plus stories, the lessons *about* storytelling were the most important ones learned in her relationship with Ray.

Sobol points out that "Ray has been invited to tell at Jonesborough every year since the festival's inception in 1973, the only storyteller to be so featured. His Saturday appearance, a Jonesborough trademark, make up a significant part of that event's claim to preeminence in the storytelling revival" ("Jack" 3). Those closely involved with the storytelling revival from its early days, such as Regan-Blake, recognized the importance of grounding the newly established festival with an already established master storyteller who was traditionally Appalachian in every sense of the word. Ray Hicks was just the man to fill this position, and his willingness to cross into this new context of the storytelling festival led him to become a storytelling mentor to many young revivalist storytellers who were newly interested in the art. Storytellers and those interested in the storytelling revival "come to the festivals seeking new stories to add to their repertoires...It almost seems that for tellers hearing Jack Tales even for the first time, there is an

immediate sense of recognition and connection” (Stotter and McCarthy 154).

When younger storytellers like Regan-Blake heard traditional master storytellers like Ray telling mountain tales at Jonesborough, they immediately became interested in this newly-discovered thing called “storytelling” and wanted to be a part of it.

Regan-Blake and Literary and Other Sources

Margaret MacDonald recognizes that revivalist storytellers “draw from literary sources for material” (199). Regan-Blake told me how, in the early days of telling stories, she learned many of the stories she told out of books. Also, she said, “then as I learned some [stories] though, during those years, I was meeting some of the traditional tellers, like the Hicks family” (Interview 3/24/09). So in this way, Regan-Blake was learning stories in the more traditional context of face-to-face transmission from traditional practitioners of the art, as well as in the non-traditional context of the published books of stories. Furthermore, MacDonald writes that many revivalist tellers draw tales from their own culture but also learn from print materials. She writes, “Lacking the opportunity to grow a strong repertoire from actually hearing tellers in performance, teachers, librarians, and other users of story rely on printed collections of the tales from their own culture” (204). Though Regan-Blake did hear famous traditional tellers such as Ray Hicks at Jonesborough and other such large-scale venues, she learned many of her stories from print materials because they were much more readily available to her than actual human bearers of the tradition. MacDonald goes on to say that

revivalist tellers “will have a few stories heard orally from her or his family or from local tellers, but most of the repertoire needs to rely on printed sources” (204). While Regan-Blake did not learn traditional stories in her own family environment growing up, she did learn some tales in the more traditional context from famed Beech Mountain teller Ray Hicks. In fact, she said that “going through school and all the way through college, I really didn’t even know about storytelling. And, as I look back, my family did tell stories, but I didn’t think of it as a ‘thing.’” (Interview 3/24/09). Though Regan-Blake was not immersed in a traditional storytelling culture until a later age than traditional tellers, she still learned many tales from traditional tellers like Ray Hicks, Stanley Hicks, and Marshall Ward.

MacDonald writes that “a large and thriving storytelling movement exists today whose tellers seek out tales from many cultures” (199). Joseph Sobol also recognizes that although many “storytellers promote the revival of an art form presumed to have flourished in an ideally imagined past, many tellers are also eagerly importing traditions and repertoires that were not part of their own particular background” (*Journey* 7). Regan-Blake says that a “good number” of the stories she tells have an Appalachian mountain setting, but “not all of them do” (Interview 3/24/09). She says,

I also tell some English and Irish stories, and I traveled over to China about eight years ago, and when I came back I learned a few Asian stories. And the same with Africa...I usually have some connection, as opposed to just looking for stories in the whole

world, especially if it's a culture outside of mine. (Interview 3/24/09)

Regan-Blake is a teller who seeks out tales from many cultures other than her own. William Bascom writes that "in passing from one society to another through diffusion, a myth or legend may be accepted without being believed, thus becoming a folktale in the borrowing society" (7). In the native culture from which the tale is borrowed, the story may be believed to be "factual," or at least nearly so.

When the storyteller takes this story out of its native culture and into a new performance context in a foreign culture, the story becomes just a "story"—containing elements of essential "truth" but not actual facts. When borrowing tales from other cultures, Regan-Blake insists that there should be some kind of connection between that story, its native culture, and herself in order for her to add the story to her own repertoire. She speaks about her travels to China and Africa which inspired her to add some stories from those places to her repertoire. Obviously, the stories must have an important meaning and relatable themes in order for someone outside the native culture to add them to his or her repertoire. Even though Regan-Blake adds stories from other cultures to her repertoire, she says, "I definitely enjoy telling the Appalachian stories" (Interview 3/24/09).

New Contexts for Storytelling

In interviews with me, storytellers Connie Regan-Blake and Faye Wooden hinted at a trend that is happening to storytelling in the modern age: traditional

tales are moving out of the homes and into more public venues, while personal experience or family experience narratives are the stories that are more likely to be told within the intimate family setting. Among all of the storytellers I have interviewed, there was an overall positive consensus that storytelling will continue in the coming generations. Regan-Blake says,

I think it's a good thing to be diligent about telling them, if you're led in that direction, encouraging other people to... I'm always encouraging people to tell within the home or on their front porch or those different venues. So I think we want to stay a bit diligent on seeing that that happens and that we encourage other people to.

(Interview 3/24/09)

Even if the traditional tales are moving out of the home setting and into a more public context, at least the stories will still be told. But families will continue to at the least share their own personal histories and possibly read the traditional tales to their children out of books.

In terms of the newer performance contexts, Bruce Watson reports that "in all, as many as 500 storytellers are making a living telling tales in schools, churches, libraries, parks, hospitals, even management-training courses...weddings and bar mitzvahs, at academic conferences and elder hostels...and museums" (63). In the traditional sense, "storytelling takes place wherever small groups gather to work or socialize" (Burrison 1186). In the newer contexts, these are more unnatural groupings of people than in the traditional contexts of family and local community. In the context of traditional storytelling

communities, the audience naturally gathers for the telling of tales. In these newer contexts in which tellers such as Regan-Blake find themselves, the audience has artificially gathered, yet the messages conveyed through the stories are the same. Skilled storytellers have been able to take their traditional stories from the realm of family and community contexts into these various performance venues. In addition to many large festivals, Regan-Blake has told at a number of professional events, such as "the National Lumber Association and the North Carolina bar association" (Interview 3/24/09). She is invited to such events in order to stimulate creativity in those in attendance. Regan-Blake was invited to a nationwide Public Health retreat to teach "people to both learn to listen to stories and how to tell them. So I'm doing the three-hour workshop and a performance" (Interview 3/24/09). This new context of storytelling is a way in which many contemporary storytellers make their living. At such professional events, many people are probably introduced to large-scale storytelling for adult audiences for the first time.

Many of the tellers I interviewed, including Connie Regan-Blake, Faye Wooden, Janice Brooks-Headrick, Lloyd Arneach, and Millie Sieber, explain that they have to alter the stories that they have learned in order to make them ready for or acceptable at certain venues. Regan-Blake explains that she keeps the "bones" of the stories the same, although she may change some of the details. She explains her process of adaptation: "I want to stay true to the story. I don't feel that I can just go in and say, 'Well, I don't like that part, it's too long. I'll leave that out. I don't like that ending; I'll change it.' I don't feel like I can do

that. And at the same time, I'm bringing my own creativity into it" (Interview 3/24/09). Like many other tellers, Regan-Blake takes the traditional stories she has learned and adapts them so that they naturally come through her own voice and point of view. Because a public audience is being introduced to the story—and possibly the related characters and culture—for the first time, it is important that storytellers fully explain the context of the tale. And this need often requires the addition of certain descriptive details or the reorganization of a tale to make it more intelligible to mainstream audiences. This act of the transfer of cultural information from the native (or adoptive native, in Regan-Blake's case) group to an outsider group is known as "cross-cultural translation," and this has been occurring in the mountains for several generations. In the world of storytelling, however, this is a relatively new phenomenon that has developed over the past couple of decades.

Adapting for New Contexts

Regan-Blake has thought considerably about how she learns and adapts traditional stories for the storytelling stage:

If I've heard, say, the Hickses tell a story and then I've seen it in, say Richard Chase's collection—those are not similar word-for-word, but they're similar stories. But then I'll also look for that particular story in other traditions or in other collections. And oftentimes, the base story can be found in lots of different cultures around the world. So then what I try to do is to kind of put all of

those into the pot, and see what simmers up as the "bones."

What's in all of them...there will be some things that will be different. But I try to keep those bones in my story. So I don't learn them word-for-word. (Interview 3/24/09)

In hearing and reading different versions of similar tales, Regan-Blake extracts from each version what is found in all of the versions in order to create a more representative version of the story. In choosing which elements of the story to keep from each of the different versions she has heard or read, Regan-Blake considers her future audience for the tale and how it will receive that particular story. The context in which a tale will be told in the future most likely affects what details or elements of the tale that Regan-Blake incorporates as a part of her own version. She may choose some elements of her story that would be more familiar to a specific audience to whom she tells frequently, such as school children or a professional conference. In this way, the perceived performance context of the story affects the version of the story that is sifted out of these many versions of the story.

Adapting stories to a narrator's individual needs even occurs among traditional tellers. William Nicolaisen observes such an adaption by a notable traditional teller: "Ray Hicks...deliberately adds small touches of his own to the stories he learned from his grandfather Ben Hicks. Before our recording session started, he had confided in me that he does this so that the stories become his own" (132-33). Regan-Blake says that the stories have to naturally come through her voice so that they are the best received by her audience. A story that she tells

is not going to be exactly the same as the version that she learned of that story, but the basic plot and structure will remain the same. It is important that a storyteller herself *believes* the story so that the audience will, in turn, also believe that story.

Nicolaisen recognizes that

while in principle a preserver of tradition...rather than a changer, Ray Hicks does not regard his deliberate, conscious, personal innovations as violations of the text he has inherited; nor does he appear to think of them as improvements per se. They merely—if merely is the right word here—function like a proprietary branding iron stamping the stories he tells as his own. (133)

Like so many other master storytellers, Ray adds his creative touches to the stories he has inherited from his long-standing family tradition, in order to keep the stories fresh and compelling for the next generations. Regan-Blake also makes some changes in the stories she has learned from Ray, printed books, and other sources so that they become her own and a seemingly natural part of her own repertory. As Kay Stone has written, “When professional and traditional tellers listen to and watch one another, this interaction can affect subsequent delivery and choice of material” (Stotter and McCarthy 154). The unique interaction and relationship that existed between Regan-Blake and Ray Hicks surely affected both Regan-Blake’s storytelling career and her view of the whole phenomenon known as the “storytelling revival.”

One of the main reasons that storytellers make subtle changes in their stories is to accommodate the specific audience at hand. Regan-Blake tells to a

lot of large audiences, particularly storytelling festival audiences that contain thousands of people. Festivals like the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough “both spread Jack Tales beyond the southern mountain homeland and alter them in performance” (Stotter and McCarthy 153). Regan-Blake is an ambassador who has taken such traditional tales as the Jack Tales from their native roots in the Appalachian mountains to a much wider audience at these festivals. In doing so, she is both making changes to the original stories, as well as helping to preserve the stories and reinvigorate the art of storytelling.

Melissa Heckler emphasizes that “it is precisely the storyteller’s work to explore a story and make a personal relationship with it. This isn’t entirely an intellectual quest, but also a quest for an emotionally meaningful relationship with a story so we can tell it with conviction” (29). Especially in the case of revivalist tellers like Regan-Blake who did not grow up in the storytelling tradition and who borrow stories from other traditional storytelling cultures, it is important that they make an emotional bond with the story so that they can tell it convincingly to an audience. Even though the story is not a part of the value system in which they were raised, they must internalize the meaning and messages of the story if it is to be well received by the audience. This process will help the story come more naturally through their own voice.

Carol Birch and Melissa Heckler have written that “surely many storytellers have experienced telling one story to an audience, and upon hearing the reaction of individual audience members, feeling that they told a different

story to every person” (10). Regan-Blake shares a similar feeling of telling her stories in a special way to each individual audience member:

One of my visual images...of storytelling is that it's as if the story is half inside me, and half out. And it's as if there's an umbilical cord to each listener, whether I can see their face clearly. No matter how many [audience members]. There's this real direct connection between the listener, the story, and myself. So I don't ever think of it as this mass of people. (Interview 3/24/09)

Because effective storytellers are able to reach each audience member individually through the stories they tell and the way in which they tell them, storytellers will forge a connection between themselves and the audience members through the shared experience of the story. Each audience member will relate to the story told based on his or her own life experience.

Oftentimes at an effective storytelling performance, storytellers connect with their audience members at a deep level. Sometimes, audience members will seek out the performer after the show and share their own reflection and reaction to the story. Regan-Blake notes that “after a performance, sometimes, people will come up to me and they'll be smiling so big, it'll be almost like, ‘Oh, do I know them from high school?’ or ‘Are they a neighbor?’ But it's because they feel like they know me. That's one of the real joys of being a storyteller” (Interview 3/24/09).

Connie Regan-Blake explained how in her early days of storytelling in the 1970s, "I told mostly traditional stories or stories from books...Back then, that was all you ever heard—traditional stories. You didn't hear the personal experience like you do today" (Interview 3/24/09). There seems to be a shift away from the traditional mountain tales to more personal stories—stories about the tellers' own experiences that they have found to be meaningful and formative in their own lives. Whereas in generations past, mountain families were telling their children and grandchildren the traditional tales, today families are more apt to share stories of their own lives and of more recent family members' noteworthy adventures.

Connie Regan-Blake also does not believe family storytelling is happening today as much as it once did, but is hopeful that some families are still carrying on the art:

I don't know a lot of mountain people in an intimate kind of way sitting and visiting for long hours. I've kept very close with the Hickses and a few other people. I don't really know if that is happening on a regular basis. I sure hope so... I'm sure it's happening in some places. (Interview 3/24/09)

So it seems that the mountain families who are passing on the traditional stories orally are few and far between. The younger generations are too distracted by television, internet, and extracurricular activities to take the time to sit and learn the old tales from older relatives. However, many mountain families seem to be still sharing personal and family experience stories within the home. It is hopeful

that even though children and teenagers do not seem to be as interested in the stories of their broader Appalachian culture, at least they are hearing the tales of their closer family members today.

The storytellers I interviewed seemed to mostly agree that, even though the traditional tales may not be as popular as they once were within families, there are certain types of stories that continue to hold the interest of the younger generations and thus continue to be told. Personal experience narratives are being told within families today more so than the traditional mountain tales. Of course, personal family stories have always been shared among family members, but this shift from traditional tales to personal tales within the Appalachian region is significant. In this way, there is a similar shift happening in the traditional culture as there has been in the individual repertoire of Regan-Blake—from the traditional to personal experience stories. While the older mountain tales may have created a bond between members of the Appalachian culture, the sharing of personal experience and family narratives forges a deep bond between family members. When people share such stories with close family members, they are celebrating the good times past and commiserating about the bad times, while all the while growing closer to their kin.

Similar experiences occur when Regan-Blake tells a personal experience narrative that contains modern elements to an audience in a large context. These shared experiences—be they positive, negative or indifferent—help to shape people and their worldviews, and the sharing of stories about the pivotal events in one's life serves to create a body of family lore. While passing down the

traditional mountain tales within families has been important for centuries as a way to create bond between family members, in some ways, the characters in the tales are abstract beings and the setting is often a faraway land. In personal and family experience stories, on the other hand, the characters are known family members and the settings are more often familiar landscapes. In this way, it is easier for people to connect with the personal experience stories and for them to find meaning in them. This happens in both traditional family contexts and in the less traditional contexts of festivals and workshops in which Regan-Blake tells.

The repertoires of contemporary tellers are changing. Donald Davis's repertoire has changed as he has become an increasingly popular revivalist storyteller, frequently featured at the National Storytelling Festival as well as other festivals throughout North America. He still tells traditional tales, although he has lately become better known for original stories based on his own life experiences. (Stotter and McCarthy 157)

Regan-Blake also learned more traditional tales out of books and from other tellers earlier in her storytelling career, but in recent years she has begun telling more personal experience stories. She says, "I don't learn literary stories almost at all anymore and have not done that—I have not learned new literary stories in the last twenty or twenty-five years, just because of the whole permission thing" (Interview 9/16/09). Another reason for her not learning new literary stories today is that she has changed her mode of learning stories from word-for-word to a more flexible style of memorizing and telling stories today: "I just don't work

on stories in that same way, you know, words being more specific" (Interview 9/16/09). She says that the stories she is adding to her repertoire today "are either traditional or they're ones I'm creating myself. And out of those ones I'm creating, it could either be a true-life personal experience or a story about someone else or a created story" (Interview 9/16/09). There are several subgenres of stories that Regan-Blake is creating and adding to her repertoire today in order to keep her stories fresh and to entertain and inform her ever-widening scope of audience.

As a revivalist teller performing in many different performances contexts and for many different types of audiences, Regan-Blake includes in her repertoire a number of personal experience stories that are perhaps more contemporary and sometimes more relatable for the audiences for which she tells. If the personal experience "story is successful, if it effectively entertains, teaches, or awes the audience, then the teller is likely to repeat it whenever the context—like the context for a proverb or a pun—is appropriate" (Stahl 269). The personal experience stories that revivalist storytellers add to their repertoires throughout the course of their career become an important part of the stories they tell and help them to relate to a wide variety of audiences. Regan-Blake puts together personal experience stories about poignant events in her life that are relatable for her audience: "I definitely do personal experience too—one about my mom passing away and her living and dying" (Interview 9/16/09). Adult audiences are sure to make connections with such universal themes as living and dying, and

personal experience narratives are therefore powerful when told to the proper audience.

Sandra Stahl emphasizes the recent heightened interest in personal experience stories:

A temptation might be to view the personal experience story as a modern replacement for the entertaining *Märchen* or for the informative and instructive oral legend. But the personal experience story as a genre has been a part of oral tradition for a long time. (269)

Even though Regan-Blake only began integrating personal experience narratives into her repertoire later on in her storytelling career, such stories have been shared throughout human history. Depending on the performance context in which she finds herself determines whether she chooses to tell traditional stories from the Appalachian culture, stories from other storytelling cultures, or personal experiences stories. Stahl goes on to say that "the personal experience story as a genre is appealing in great measure because of this vulnerability of the storyteller. Nothing creates intimacy quite so well as some confession or exposure of the self" (274). Furthermore, "the teller proves heroic not by hiding that vulnerability but by courageously accepting responsibility for the story" (Stahl 274). Regan-Blake probably chooses to tell personal experience stories when she is in front of an audience that she feels will best connect with this type of story, as well as a specific personal experience story in particular. For example, when telling at a professional conference, as she has often done, she could choose a personal

experience story from her repertoire that contain themes or messages that relate to that line of work or lifestyles of those in attendance. Regan-Blake said in regards to story selection for any certain venue, "I usually think about it a little bit ahead of time. You know, so especially if there's a theme, like this Public Health gathering" (Interview 3/24/09). In this way, she is able to move between performance contexts in effective ways so that the stories are received well by each particular audience.

Regan-Blake's Choosing Genres for Audience

The audience at a venue determines whether Regan-Blake will pull from her older repertoire of more traditional stories or from her newer repertoire of more personal experience stories: "I have some stories that I tell in elementary school that I probably would not tell like at festivals or at other kinds of events" (Interview 9/16/09). Regan-Blake says she has about thirty-five to forty stories from which she can choose for any given elementary school audience and subdivisions within that amount for the different age groups. She says, "of those stories, probably a third of them are traditional stories and some of those traditional stories are definitely Jack Tales. Then I also tell a couple of African stories, an Asian story" (Interview 9/16/09). Another genre of stories that Regan-Blake has ready in her repertoire for different storytelling audiences is literary stories, of which she has some for children, such as *Where the Wild Things Are*, and for adult audiences, such as *Oliver Hyde*. Regan-Blake has a set of stories about true-life people that she has developed and tells specifically for adult

audiences: "With adults I have some stories that I tell that are about true-life people. So they're not about me but about people that live, that have lived, so I'm telling a story that I have put together about those people" (Interview 9/16/09).

Regan-Blake also recognizes the metanarration that happens at storytelling events in which she informs the audience how she learned a certain circumstance or an event in her own life that relates closely to that story:

The introductions to some of the traditional stories are stories in themselves. So that they might be more of a personal experience story of when I went to China and someone that I met there, and then the person in this story reminds me a lot of them, and then I would tell that story as well. (Interview 9/16/09)

This metanarration becomes personal experience stories that can also stand alone as separate narratives in Regan-Blake's repertoire.

Another characteristic of revivalist tellers, as identified by MacDonald, is that they invent "their own imaginative stories [and shape] personal stories" (199). Sandra Stahl writes that the personal experience story "is a narrative creation of the teller, and it uses not only the experience itself as a base but also many traditional aspects of storytelling—predictable form, evidence of cultural and personal stylization, conventional functions" (268). The skilled storyteller takes a relatable life event from his or her own experience and shapes it into a recognizable story form, ready for performance in front of an audience. Early in her career, Regan-Blake told mostly traditional stories, and did not take creative license to create her own stories or to refashion her personal experiences for

sharing on the storytelling stage. However, she explains how “nowadays, I tell a lot of different kinds of stories. I tell true-life, I have some original, some personal experience, but probably in the first fifteen years it was” only traditional stories that she told (Interview 3/24/09). Having such variety in her repertoire as traditional Appalachian stories, Asian stories, African stories, and personal experience stories, Regan-Blake is well-equipped to perform in any performance context in which she finds herself.

Regan-Blake's Adaptability and Audiences

Scholar Henry Glassie speaks of three “threads” of the storytelling tradition: “one tradition is continuous, running quietly at the edge of thought and beneath common life”; “another, noisy and conspicuous, is modernization”; “a third tradition is built of recursive work, as people plunder the past to confect new things” (qtd. in MacDonald 205). Regan-Blake seems to be a storyteller who traverses all these threads of the tradition, combining the tradition that runs quiet “beneath common life” embodied in her mentor, Ray Hicks, with the forces of modernization, represented by the many contexts in which she tells stories and mediums by which she shares her stories that are products of the storytelling revival. Regan-Blake has plundered the past (i.e., traditional stories shared by Ray Hicks) to confect a new storytelling generation in which traditional stories are combined with creative elements and personal experience stories. These “personal experience [narratives act] as a means of reincorporating the mystical event into everyday reality, a structuring of an unstructured incident so that it can

be shared with and perhaps inspire, others” (Mullen 484). Storytellers who incorporate personal experience stories into their more traditionally based repertoires engage in the act of organizing an actual event in their life into a logical story that will be readily understood and relatable to a storytelling audience.

Many of the other tellers I interviewed expressed the importance of obtaining as much information about the potential audience beforehand from whoever was booking the event, so that they were able to plan their program accordingly. When the teller knows as much as possible about the audience and is able to plan his or her story selection accordingly, the audience is more likely to be receptive to the stories, and thus the sponsor of the program is more likely to be pleased with the teller and perhaps invite him or her back in the future. This is especially important to the five of my interviewees, including Regan-Blake, who identify themselves as full-time storytellers, meaning that they rely on performance fees as their sole source of income. Even though the tellers I interviewed liked to plan as much as possible about what stories they are going to tell at a certain event, they emphasized the importance of being flexible, of being able to pull different tales out of their repertoire if the audience was different than expected or did not seem to be responding to the planned tales.

Regan-Blake has developed a system over the years of her telling in which she makes a list of about twenty stories a day or two before the event. After seeing the venue or event site, she narrows the list down to eight or ten stories. Then after meeting some of the audience members if possible, she narrows down

her list to the actual stories she is going to perform, yet always keeping “a little space for maybe four or five options.” Once she is actually onstage, “any of those twenty [stories chosen prior to performance], any of the hundred and something I know, any of those are wide open for telling. And sometimes it does change because I feel like it really comes from the audience” (Interview 3/24/09).

Successful tellers know that they must learn to trust their instincts in terms of what the audience is going to be receptive to and enjoy the most. The tellers I interviewed agreed that audience reaction and receptivity to the stories being told are always more important than following a pre-planned program.

Regan-Blake insists that she remain open to sharing any of the hundred-plus stories that she knows when she arrives at a storytelling event because she feels certain stories sometimes “speak” to her as needing to be told to certain audiences:

I like to think of it as the story coming and tapping me on the shoulder wanting to be told. And so I try to stay open for that...Maybe during a telling, deciding at the last minute to tell something I hadn't even thought of in, you know, a long time. But it taps, and if it taps enough, then I usually follow that. And I've had the experience several times that people come up to me afterwards and will comment on that particular story and will say how meaningful it was. So I've gotten that feedback that I really trust that voice when it happens. (Interview 3/24/09)

When Regan-Blake stays open to telling any of the many stories she knows in any performance context, she is better equipped to reach the audience and to tell the stories that they need to hear. Somehow as a skilled storyteller, she is often able to pinpoint the exact story that most needs to be shared.

What makes a storytelling event most “aesthetically pleasing is the complete attention and respect that the storyteller pays to the story, the audience, the place, and the occasion” (Birch and Heckler 12). When Regan-Blake allows a specific story to “tap her on the shoulder,” she is paying attention to the story, audience, place, and occasion. When a storyteller is in tune with all of these elements, “something takes place, something that is at the heart of human communication, something so successful it has propelled us forward on this planet as the animal who tells, listens, and love stories” (Birch and Heckler 12).

Storytelling has persisted in its various performance contexts thanks to tellers who pay close attention to the needs of their audiences. In this way, the audience members are interested in the tales, pay attention to them, and carry them on into the future. Regan-Blake pays special attention to their needs and preferences.

Tellers also try to meet audience members as they enter the theater or festival so that they can get an exact idea of the demographics of the audience. Regan-Blake says, “If it’s possible to maybe meet a few people as they’re coming in, that’s my preference” (Interview 3/24/09). When storytellers are able to meet or at least see their audience before they actually go on stage, they feel more confident that the stories they are about to tell will speak most effectively to the audience’s needs and wants as individual listeners. Ultimately, a positive

reception of the stories by the audience is the most important part of any performance.

Regan-Blake speaks about the importance of telling the appropriate stories to the appropriate audiences. Even though young children will often say that they want to be told scary stories, a wise storyteller chooses the appropriate level of scariness for each audience:

I just really knew that in telling those stories to the appropriate age group—because I don't believe in telling them to third graders no matter how much they say, "We wanna be scared!" I would never tell ["Two White Horses" or "Mr. Fox"] to young children. But when you tell it to the right age, whether it's high school students or adults, there is something really transformative and magical that happens in the audience. (Interview 3/24/09)

Regan-Blake wisely chooses not to tell the really chilling tales in her repertoire to her younger audiences, even though they often think they want to "be scared." The performance context in which she finds herself determines the story selected to tell at any given event. Regan-Blake is able to shift between the performance contexts of elementary school audiences, high school audiences, and adult audiences because she has such a wide variety of stories available for telling in her repertoire.

Family Contexts versus Festival Settings

Regan-Blake commented that one of the ways in which telling to a large audience differs from telling stories in a smaller family setting is that "I'm not hearing stories from those other people, which I think in a family setting you would end up hearing some of their stories as well" (Interview 3/24/09). This sharing of stories by all of those present in the family setting directly affects how each person's stories are told, and what stories are told because as one person tells a story that narrative may jog another person's memory and he or she will begin telling a story on a related topic. When a storyteller is telling in front of a large audience that is not giving direct verbal feedback, he or she must pick up on more subtle clues as to which stories or themes that audience most enjoys or wants to hear more about. In this way, a storyteller telling in front of a larger audience has to be more skilled in determining what kind of stories that particular audience likes in order to best entertain and perform for that audience. Another way in which the family context is different from the stage context, according to Regan-Blake, is that "in a home environment...you're going to definitely hear some of the same stories" (Interview 3/24/09). In the large festival context, "there's not near as much repetition" (Interview 3/24/09). The traditional teller telling in the family context is going to tell the same story many times to the same small group of people, and those listeners are going to notice when any variations are made to the story. In fact, they might even know the oral version and its teller that were the basis for that story, and, in that way, the listeners can even determine how much that teller has changed the story from the version he or she originally heard. For a festival audience, the listeners usually do not have any basis for determining

how much the storyteller has altered the story from its original version.

Something else that happens that is unique to the family context is that “you can kind of bring in characteristics of some of the family members, or poke a little fun or something like that” (Interview 3/24/09). This personalization of the stories is not possible on such a level when performing in a large festival context.

When asked to elaborate on the similarities and differences between storytelling in the traditional context versus the less traditional contexts in which she tells, Regan-Blake gave the following as an example of a similarity between the intimate family context and the large-scale festival context:

When there’s great storytelling happening, people create their own community. So as listeners, they create their own family...there is just such a closeness, even though you might not know anyone sitting around you. After the stories are told and when there’s a break, people usually end up telling their own stories or something about their family. (Interview 3/24/09)

Even though at festivals there are usually audiences in the hundreds—if not thousands—of people, the telling of stories that involve a wide range of emotions and feelings brings people close together, especially when the events in the story are relatable and common to so many people. As such, “in opening minds, hearts, and souls through story, perhaps we then open people to deeper relatedness amongst themselves” (Heckler 32).

John Burrison writes that “as oral literature, folk stories differ from their printed short-fiction counterparts in their variation (resulting from mouth-to-ear

transmission and creative retelling) and their performance to and interaction with a live audience” (1186). When a person reads a traditional story (or anything else) in a published book, he or she is only getting one variant of that story, and the story is not being tailored specifically for him or her. Regan-Blake comments on the difference between a large-scale festival performance versus an intimate family context: “For one thing, you don’t know—the storyteller—doesn’t know their listeners. And I think that’s a huge difference” (Interview 3/24/09). When a storyteller is telling in a small family or community context, he or she likely knows all the hearers very well. On the other hand, when telling in a large performance context the storyteller does not know the audience members as individuals and thus cannot tailor the specific stories or story details to their needs. Similarly, when traditional stories are written down and published in a book, they exist forever in only one form and cannot be “told” individually to each reader. In this way, these newer performance contexts of large festival or conference audience and published books and recordings are similar in terms of disconnection with audience members. However, Regan-Blake argues she does interpret audience responses during a performance: “It’s an interesting thing and I’ve experienced this, I’ve gotten feedback on it, and I’ve really experienced it almost every time I tell. Even though I’m on stage and it might be 100 or 500 people in the audience, there is an intimacy that is created that is really almost surprising” (Interview 3/24/09). Through the telling of her stories, Regan-Blake successfully crosses the boundary from traditional to non-traditional performance contexts.

Innovation in Revivalist Tellings

William McCarthy recognizes the changes made by revivalist tellers:

When we read a tale or even when we listen to a performance, it is often hard to tell how much of what we are reading or hearing is tradition and how much is the individual talent of the tale-teller. From time to time, though, we can compare an individual's performance with the source from which that person learned the tale. (168)

Because Regan-Blake specifically mentions the sources from which she gleaned at least her early stories, listeners are able to go back to these printed sources in order to compare them to Regan-Blake's version of these stories.

A revivalist storyteller "may alter the story—content, style, structure—for a specific performance context (radio, theater, storytelling festival) or may adapt it for an adult audience or for very young children" (Stotter and McCarthy 155). Because Regan-Blake tells in so many contexts, she makes adaptations in the stories she chooses to tell and what details she chooses to include in those stories on any particular occasion. When asked about her audio recordings and print materials, Regan-Blake said, "I'm in several books. Yeah, probably about five or six books that have one or two of my stories in a collection or an article about me or something and a couple of stories. And I have five recordings" (Interview 3/24/09). Furthermore, Regan-Blake said, "A big part of what I do is workshops. And I've given a week-long workshop for—this summer will be the fourth year.

We actually go and visit the Hickses as part of that workshop” (Interview 3/24/09). In this way, Regan-Blake is giving others the opportunity that she had several decades ago, of being exposed to a traditional storytelling family and community and hearing the stories that they keep as such an important part of their history and culture. These workshops are the training grounds for future revivalist storytellers who will keep alive the traditions that have existed for generations in places like Beech Mountain, as well as craft newer stories that will become the “traditions” of the future.

On a similar note, a skilled storyteller will tailor each story to each specific storytelling event, subtly changing details in order to make the story most productive in that particular performance context. As Carol Birch has written:

An audience at a storytelling event—as opposed to those listening to a prepared speech or play—justly expect their presence to help create a singular occasion. The story is not the same story it was when the storyteller practiced it before the concert began, nor when he told it to fourth-graders or any other audience. (107)

The audience has a direct effect on the occasion at hand because the storyteller pays attention to their demographics—and later their reactions to the stories—in order to determine what stories he or she is going to tell. Because no two audiences are exactly the same, no two performances of any given story are going to be exactly the same either.

Regan-Blake and “Two White Horses”

All of the storytellers that I interviewed agreed that people coming into the Appalachian region, and perhaps hearing traditional tales for the first time, truly enjoy the stories and are often quite surprised that stories are not just for the enjoyment of children. There is always another audience out there that has yet to be introduced to true traditional storytelling and that will be thrilled with it once they hear a good storyteller for the first time. Therefore, individuals from any culture coming into Appalachia for the first time could definitely take away a powerful message when they attend a storytelling performance by a skilled teller. "Two White Horses," Regan-Blake's signature tale, is a haunting story about a woman being buried alive and returning to her home the next night, only for her family to not believe that she is actually alive. When Regan-Blake began telling this tale on a wide-spread scale, she elicited notable audience reactions:

I think that [story] got me on a lot of festival stages because people would hear that and it changed their concept of storytelling.

Because they sometimes would be thinking the same as I had—that storytelling was only for little kids in a library. And when they heard me tell that story, it was like "Whoa, this is a powerful story for adults." (Interview 3/24/09)

"Two White Horses" became Regan-Blake's signature story after it was introduced to her by Jimmy Neil Smith, the Director of the International Storytelling Center at Jonesborough. Smith gave Regan-Blake a transcript of the story from a mountain woman by Elizabeth Seeman in 1973. Regan-Blake herself said that the story "was so powerful for me" (Interview 3/24/09).

Furthermore, Regan-Blake knew that “Two White Horses” was a special story because it “was the first story I knew wasn’t for young kids. It wasn’t even for second, third, and fourth graders—this was for teenagers and adults. So it was a real turning point for me” (Interview 3/24/09). Coming to the realization that there are important stories out there that hold important messages for adults and older children seems to be an important realization in the life of a storyteller, especially one who did not grow up in the tradition and thus comes to storytelling as entertainment later in life.

Regan-Blake “told [‘Two White Horses’] for the first time at the second National Storytelling Festival and has told constantly ever since” (Sobol, *Journey* 88). This tale is “a literary tale adapted from folkloric sources by the Tennessee writer Elizabeth Seeman...It is a story of literal revitalization, which will not let what is truly precious die. In a symbolic way for Regan-Blake, it is a totemic tale of her own storytelling revival” (Sobol, *Journey* 88). The case of “Two White Horses” is an interesting one that follows a story from folkloric roots, to the literary interpretation of writer Seeman, to the discovery and reconstruction for the storytelling stage by Regan-Blake. This story has certainly shown its resilience in being able to stand up in many different storytelling contexts.

This signature tale has an unusual first-person perspective, in which Regan-Blake *becomes* a character in the story, who then speaks about the events. She uses this narrative perspective in both versions of the stories I have encountered. In Regan-Blake’s performance of “Two White Horses” on the CD recording *Spirits Walk: Chilling Tales for Teenagers and Adults*, she offers no

background information about the tale. It begins and ends only with some brief melodic music. In her performance of that same tale on the VHS recording *Storytelling: Tales and Techniques*, she adds substantial metanarration about the background of this specific tale and also historical information that pertains to the time period in which "Two White Horses" is set. This addition makes sense because this particular performance was in front of a group of adults who had come to one of Regan-Blake and her cousin Barbara Freeman's workshops about effective storytelling. This analysis of a tale told at a workshop is important because Regan-Blake conducts many workshops and they are a major part of what she does as a storyteller. It is interesting to note the distinctions between her telling the same story at a workshop event and on an audio recording that will be mass-marketed and sold to a public audience. Before getting into the tale on the workshop recording, Regan-Blake speaks about the importance of choosing powerful stories to add to your own storytelling repertoire: "You want to make sure you just delight in the telling of" any story you choose to prepare and tell for an audience (*Storytelling*). In looking for a story to tell for an audience, Regan-Blake advises aspiring storytellers to choose a story that really means something to them personally.

In starting to tell "Two White Horses" on the *Storytelling* film, Regan-Blake introduces the story in its historical context, as well as its importance in her own storytelling career. It was the first story that truly spoke to her as being a powerful story for older audiences, eventually becoming her signature story. Both versions of the story on the *Storytelling* film and on the *Spirits Walk* audio

recording begin with the same compelling line: "Amanda Jane fixed me with her big round eyes. 'Mama'll be home tomorrow, won't she, Jenny?'" The listeners immediately become interested in the distinctive syntax in the sentence and listen to hear what happens next in this story which has promised to be particularly compelling. The next section of the story is exactly the same as told in both versions, with the exception of the word "place" being used in the *Spirits Walk* version and "house" being used in the *Storytelling* version. The listeners soon realize that the mother in the story has died and the family is preparing for her burial. The walk to the graveyard is narrated, along with details about the procession of family members.

On the *Storytellers* film, Regan-Blake skips ahead at this point by saying that "the story goes on to tell about the funeral," and later that evening, the family hears a knock at their door. In such a storytelling workshop that is being filmed for the production of this video, Regan-Blake uses examples of many types of stories, and it is necessary that she tell abbreviated versions of each of the stories. In the version on *Spirits Walk*, Regan-Blake narrates the specific details about the funeral, including the hymns sung and by whom, her father's emotions, and her own emotions on that day. The narrator then finds herself back home, cooking dinner, and then down for bed for the night. She cannot sleep and keeps thinking about her mother who has just been buried. Suddenly the family hears a knock at the door of their small house. This is where the *Storytelling* version picks back up, and is identical to the *Spirits Walk* version for the next couple of lines. The narrator's father calls:

"Who's there?"

"Open the door, Clint. It's me, Alfia," Mama's voice answered. It sounded weak and far away. "I've come home from the grave."

"No, no. Go away!" Papa almost shouted.

At this point, Regan-Blake says, in the *Storytelling* version of story, that the family thought it was a ghost at their door and then skips ahead some more. In the *Spirits Walk* version of the story, Regan-Blake has an extended dialogue between the mother and the father, with the mother insisting that she is not really dead while the father is telling her that she is a ghost and that it is the bright moonlight that has "got her awake."

In the next part of the story in both versions, the father tells his children that "if our two horses have their heads out of the stall windows a-lookin' the way they do when someone comes, I'll know for sure it's your mother." He looks outside to the stable, and the two horses do have their heads out of their stall as if someone was coming, so he knows that his wife is outside the door alive. He opens the door, and she falls into his arms. Naturally, the family is curious as to how she is still alive, how she got out of the coffin, and how she made it back home. In both versions of the stories, the returned mother offers this explanation:

Well, a grave robber dug up my coffin and pried off the lid. He stole grandmother's broach but he couldn't get my rings off. He was trying to cut away my fingers...the pain got me awake. I sat up and screamed. That old man hollered too. Dropped his knife and went hoppin' away, across those graves.

Due to time constraints in the workshop setting, Regan-Blake omits the question and answer about how the mother made it home, as well as the father's reaction to the grave robber, in the version on the *Storytelling* film.

The ending of the story proper is exactly the same in both of these versions:

Papa took a wide board and he sought out two horses' heads. He painted them white like Bird and Doc, and he nailed them to the side of their stall window so as we'd never forget how it was those horses knew it was mama that night in the moonlight when she knocked on our door.

In the version of this story on the *Spirits Walk* compact disc, this is the very end of the story, so the listener simply hears the music signaling the end of the story, and the recording moves on to the next story. In a live telling of this story, such as a workshop version heard on the *Storytelling* film, Regan-Blake is likely to add more details about how she came across this story and how it connects with the historical time period in which it is set. She tells her audience that the first person to write this story down was Elizabeth Seeman, who heard it from an older lady she knew well and in whose family this story had actually occurred. The audience then finds out that this was a true story that had actually happened to a Tennessee family and that it was an orally transmitted story until it was written down by Seeman, and then Regan-Blake picked up the story and began telling it orally once more.

Even though Regan-Blake omits many details and dialogue in the story for the version she tells at the workshop in the *Storytelling* film, the audience gets a fuller sense of the background of the story because they learn her personal connection with it in the beginning, as well as the origins of the story itself. After telling this story, Regan-Blake tells the audience that it is important to conduct background research on such historical stories before adding them to your own storytelling repertoire. She reveals that she had done some research on the turn-of-the-century setting of this story and had learned about burial practices of that time. Learning about those had helped her realize how someone like the mother in "Two White Horses" really could be buried alive, and also in this way, she can pass this information along to her audience and they can have a fuller appreciation for both the story and the historical characters in it.

Regan-Blake and "Mary Culhane"

Another story that Regan-Blake has been telling for a long time is "Mary Culhane," a spooky story about a young girl who unwillingly accompanies a dead man on his sinister activities in town one night. Regan-Blake told me that the source for this tale was the children's story book "*The Goblins Giggle*" and *Other Stories* by Molly Bang. The first difference between Regan-Blake's spoken version of this tale and her literary source are the names used for the tale. In Bang's book the tale is named "Mary Culhane and the Dead Man," which certainly gives prospective readers more information about what kind of story this

is and some of the characters involved. There are several other adaptations that will be seen, that Regan-Blake has made to this story for the storytelling stage.

Like the version of "Two White Horses" that Regan-Blake tells on the *Storytelling* film, the version of "Mary Culhane" that she tells on this film is also an abbreviated version of the longer story that is contained in its entirety on the CD recording *Spirits Walk*. A major difference between the tellings of "Mary Culhane" and "Two White Horses" is that the version of "Mary Culhane" contained on the *Storytelling* film is only the opening section of the story—identical to the version on the *Spirits Walk* recording, up to a certain point in the story. Regan-Blake tells the story with all its details up to a certain point to illustrate to her workshop audience how best to introduce a tale, get the audience interested, and actually get into the telling of the tale. On the other hand, Regan-Blake tells "Two White Horses" on the *Storytelling* film in its entirety—omitting many details to make the story move along more quickly—because she wants the audience to hear the whole story and to understand why that particular story was so powerful to Regan-Blake and such a seminal piece in her repertoire. In this way, the shortened versions of the two stories that are told at the filmed workshop are altered by Regan-Blake in these different ways in order to best illustrate the point she is trying to prove to her workshop audience with that particular story.

In the film, Regan-Blake introduces "Mary Culhane" by saying that this is a good story for the middle school-aged audience—often the hardest age group to reach with storytelling. She says that many children in the seventh or eighth grade are observably less than enthusiastic when they are ushered into their

school's auditorium for one of her storytelling performances. However, she has found that telling the children that she is going to tell them a ghost story immediately piques their interest, and lets them know that she tells stories that will be interesting for their age group and not just for small children. In the workshop that is filmed on the *Storytelling* film, Regan-Blake gives the audience members tips on telling stories to such audiences, telling them how to introduce the story of "Mary Culhane": "I'm really drawn to scary stories, the ones that send a chill down your spine," and that "a lot of those stories are set in graveyards, such as" this particular tale. In the version of "Mary Culhane" on *Spirits Walk*, Regan-Blake goes right into telling the tale, without offering any information about the tale, what types of audiences would respond well to it, or how to introduce the tale. Once again, this shows the difference in audience from the aspiring storyteller workshop audience on the film to the casual listener of stories on the CD recording. Those at the workshop want to learn how to tell stories and to set the stage for them, while the CD audience is only casual—yet interested—listeners who seek entertainment.

The story of "Mary Culhane" is about a girl whose father left his walking stick in the graveyard near their house one day. She goes to fetch it that evening after he realized he had left it. In the literary version of this tale appearing in *Goblins Giggle*, Mary's father expresses fear that his walking stick will be stolen: "I hope no gypsies steal it in the night, for it's a prize shillelagh" (29). The fact that Regan-Blake makes no mentions of gypsies in either of her versions of the tale show that she has made this adaptation for the stage, perhaps for the sake of

politically correctness in the modern age. Regan Blake also does not use the Irish word “shillelagh” in her version of the story. She realized that many individuals in her potential audiences for the story would not immediately know what this term means. Thus, she uses the more familiar term “walking stick” throughout her tellings of “Mary Culhane.”

When Mary arrives at the “new-dug grave” where her father had left his walking stick and reaches to pick it up, she hears a voice from under the dirt: “Leave the blackthorn [walking stick], Mary Culhane, and help me out of this hole” (*Storytelling; Spirits Walk; Goblins Giggle* 30). She is frightened, but something draws her to the edge of the fresh grave, and as she does, the corpse climbs out of the hole and onto her back. In the version of this story in *Goblins Giggle*, the mysterious voice instructs Mary to remove the casket lid before he is able to climb on her back, yet in Regan-Blake’s oral tellings of the tale, there is no casket lid to be removed—at least as far as the audience is concerned. Perhaps Regan-Blake omitted this piece of dialogue and detail about the story in order to keep the story moving along. However, Mary’s willing removal of the casket lid in the *Goblins Giggle* print version shows her compliance in doing as the voice tells her more than in Regan-Blake’s spoken versions, in which Mary is suddenly overtaken by the dead man who has hopped out of his freshly dug grave.

The dead man “put one cold hand around her neck, and with the other, pointed a finger for her to walk away from those graves” (*Storytelling; Spirits Walk*). This is where the word-for-word narration of the version of this story on the *Storytelling* film ends, and Regan-Blake informs her audience that the story

goes on and ends with Mary Culhane saving the lives of three young boys. In both the printed version in *Goblins Giggle* and the audio-recording on *Spirits Walk*, the story continues with Mary trudging along to the village with the weight of the dead man bearing down heavy on her back. As they approach the first house in town the dead man says, "Ahhhhh, we can't go in here. I smell the smell of holy water" (*Spirits Walk*). Yet in the version in *Goblins Giggle* the dead man says, "We can't go in. I smell the smell of clean water, but I smell the smell of holy water, too" (30). It is interesting that Regan-Blake omits the detail about the dead man also smelling "clean water" that was in her source for this story. Again, this omission does not affect the main plot of the story and was more than likely removed to keep the story moving along and to keep the audience interested without becoming too wordy.

When the dead man finally finds a house that suits him as having no holy water inside, he instructs Mary to carry him into that house. Once they get inside she brings him some oatmeal to eat, but he is angered because there is no clean water to drink. Because of this lack, he tells Mary to carry him upstairs, and he kills three young boys—or "three young men," in the case of the *Goblins Giggle* version (32). The result of Regan-Blake changing these characters to boys instead of men makes the murders seem more cruel, and her audience is even more sympathetic for the victims' families. This change makes the story and its redemptive ending even more powerful for Regan-Blake's storytelling audiences. The dead man kills the three characters by making an incision in one finger of each of them and catching three drops of blood in a dish which Mary has fetched

for him. Regan-Blake illustrates what happens to each of the victims as the drops of blood fall into the dish: "He let that blood drop down into that dish and with the first drop, the flush left their faces. With the second, their breathing stopped. And with the third, they were as cold and pale as the corpse himself" (*Spirits Walk*). The same scene is narrated in her source, the printed version: "When the first drop fell, their breathing stopped; the second fell and the flush went from their faces. After the third drop fell, they were white and cold as the corpse himself" (*Goblins Giggles* 32). Although not a major difference in narration, the fact that Regan-Blake rearranges the first two results of the blood drops landing in the dish—the flush leaving their faces and their breathing stopping—shows that she does not have this story memorized exactly word-for-word, even in passages in the story in which she adheres quite closely to her source version.

After the dead man has completed his work in that house, he instructs Mary to carry him back to the graveyard. On their walk back to his grave, the dead man tells Mary of three stone heaps in a nearby field under each of which is a pot of gold known only to the dead. When they arrive back at his grave, the dead man tries to pull Mary down into his grave, but she is saved by the crowing of a rooster, which signifies that it is morning and thus the end of the time when spirits can walk among the living. In the *Goblins Giggles* version, right before fading into his grave again the dead man says, "Ah, Mary Culhane, if I had thought the cock would crow before I was in the grave, I would never have told you of the gold" (35). The reader is reminded that the dead man told Mary that only the dead know about this field, and the text hints at Mary's future action of

obtaining ownership of the field in exchange for bringing the three men back to life. Regan-Blake simply omits this line in her version of the tale contained on *Spirits Walk*. The story ends with Mary, with her knowledge about what happened the previous night, bringing the three men back to life. The *Goblins Giggle* version recounts that “it is also said that she married the eldest of the three sons and they lived a long and happy” (40). Regan-Blake includes no such detail about Mary, perhaps adhering to her dislike about “sweetening up” the endings of traditional stories, as she points out that Walt Disney did in so many of his films (Interview 3/24/09). Regan-Blake does not feel that it is necessary to make endings of stories always happy, especially when the traditional version of the stories did not have such a happy ending. True life does not always have happy endings, so it makes sense that some stories end on a bittersweet note.

The striking similarity of the opening section of this story on the *Spirits Walk* compact disc and on the *Storytelling* video recording—and that the two telling are so many years apart—shows that Regan-Blake has formularized this opening very specifically. She has adapted the beginning of this story and the setting of the scene from her source version, *Goblins Giggle*. She makes small changes such as the exact description of Mary’s house in relation to the graveyard and to the town. For the purpose of showing her workshop audience how to best introduce and start a scary story to a middle school-aged audience, this brief narration of “Mary Culhane” serves its purpose on the *Storytelling* film. In the context of the CD recording *Spirits Walk* the audience listens expectantly as Regan-Blake continues telling the story to its completion, ending again with a

brief section of music before the next story is told. The version of the story that Regan-Blake proceeds to tell on *Spirits Walk* is structurally identical to her source story found in *Gobbles Giggle*, though she does make some changes and omissions to details of the story that do not change the overall plot or outcome of the story.

An Accomplished Revivalist

Although Connie Regan-Blake is a wholly revivalist storyteller, she is a revivalist teller in the best sense of the term. She fully embraces the most positive aspects of Appalachian culture and shares her love and respect for the region with wider mainstream audiences during her performances. Regan-Blake has been a key figure in the National Storytelling Network, based out of Jonesborough, Tennessee, since its inception as NAPPS in the 1970s, and this involvement has led her to have close relationships with many storytellers from various walks of life. One of the most influential storytellers that Regan-Blake encountered over the years was western North Carolina farmer and storyteller Ray Hicks, who served as her storytelling mentor for upwards of thirty years. Regan-Blake's close friendship with Hicks and his family gave her an even deeper understanding of mountain storytelling and the unique culture in which it is contained. Regan-Blake learned many stories from Ray Hicks over the years, as well as stories from literary sources and other storytellers. She makes her own adaptations to these tales to best serve the needs of each specific audience to which she tells. These adaptations Regan-Blake makes in each performance context allow her to be a

positive ambassador for both Appalachian culture and the storytelling world as a whole, a role she takes very seriously.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

Storytelling Today

Even though there has been a steady increase in the forms of entertainment available to everyday people in America over the past century, the age-old art of storytelling continues to be upheld in some communities in southern Appalachia. The western North Carolina Jack Tale and Cherokee storytelling traditions in particular are two storytelling traditions that are still thriving in communities today. For many generations, traditional stories have been passed down through families and close-knit communities in both the Cherokee and southern Appalachian cultures. Oral traditions remained strong because these were both largely oral cultures; people taught and instructed the rising generations through the use of stories which expressed community morals and values.

Traditional stories remained popular and unchallenged for many years until the introduction of twentieth-century forms of entertainment such as the radio, television, and computer. These newer forms of entertainment appealed to people both within traditional cultures and in the mainstream because they offered information that was seemingly more timely than the ancient tales. Even noted storyteller Ray Hicks, who was an important mentor of two of the tellers in this study, lamented the influence of television. He told Scottish folklorist Barbara McDermitt:

They welcomed me to come to their homes, and then the others
 would come, and gosh I'd have crowds of children. Now adder
 [after] television come and cut it down a lot. Television ruined it.
 They got me to come to some of their homes. An I got there, and
 they got television an they got it turned on so loud, they quit
 listenin to me an I couldn't tell no tale, an I quit. (5)

For a time, interest in storytelling waned, but with the resurgence in the folk arts movement in the late 1960s, traditional storytelling came to the forefront of American popular consciousness. In this incarnation of storytelling, however, many traditional and revivalist storytellers took the tales out of their traditional contexts and moved into more public mainstream contexts, such as schools and festivals. Some traditional storytellers continued to share their tales within the traditional family and small community setting, but other traditionalists recognized that their beloved stories must be taken to a wider mainstream audience if they are to stand the test of time in the coming generations.

With the arrival of the storytelling revival in the early 1970s, people from outside of the traditional storytelling cultures became interested in listening to and learning traditional tales. This renewed interest in traditional storytelling first led to the establishment of the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee, and soon storytelling guilds across the country established many other regional storytelling festivals. Storytelling festivals provided venues in which both revivalist tellers and traditional tellers could hone their craft and share their stories with increasingly larger audiences. Another venue that became popular for

storytellers during this time period was the public school, and both traditional and revivalist storytellers were booked for performances for schoolchildren. As some storytellers become more confident in their skills, they conduct workshops in which they share with interested parties effective ways in which to tell certain types of stories, often with target audiences.

Awards and Achievements

In recent years, Connie Regan-Blake has been honored with several awards in the circle of professional storytelling, including the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Storytelling Network, an organization with which she has been closely aligned for over three decades. With the receipt of this award in 2006, "Connie is recognized for raising public awareness of storytelling, preserving traditional art forms and for the significant originality of her life's work" ("Awards"). *Mountain Times* writer Sherrie Norris reports on Regan-Blake's Lifetime Achievement Award:

Regan-Blake's love for and interest in the lives of such local celebrities as the late Ray Hicks and family, as well as many others in the area she has supported and helped promote, has made her a "best friend" to traditional story-telling, as we know it in The High Country.

Regan-Blake has devoted her career and life to the preservation of the traditional art of storytelling and to bringing storytelling to wider mainstream audiences. An interesting collaboration that Regan-Blake made was with the Kandinsky Trio,

which was “an innovative blend of storytelling and chamber music [that] has been hailed as a ‘new art form’” (Norris). In 1996, Regan-Blake was inducted into the Circle of Excellence of the National Storytelling Association. She has also been “designated as an ambassador for storytelling at the International Storytelling Center” in Jonesborough, Tennessee (“Awards”).

Orville Hicks has also received his share of awards recognizing his work as an exemplary traditional mountain storyteller. The North Carolina Folklore Society presented Orville with the Brown-Hudson Award in 1997, the same award presented to Ray Hicks in 1985. This award is given “to persons who have in special ways contributed to the appreciation, continuation, or study of North Carolina folk traditions” (“Brown-Hudson”). He has also received the 2007 North Carolina Heritage Award in recognition of his efforts in perpetuating traditional storytelling. Wayne Martin, Folklife Director of the North Carolina Arts Council, recognized Hicks and other award recipients “for their artistry and life-long commitment to preserve important cultural traditions” (North Carolina Arts Council). Hicks was also presented with the Paul Green Multimedia Award in recognition for his efforts in preserving North Carolina history through his compact disc *Mule Egg Seller and Appalachian Storyteller* CD recording, which was funded by the North Carolina Arts Council. The North Carolina Society of Historians presents this award to individuals who have made a substantial contribution to the preservation of North Carolina history (“Paul Green”).

Lloyd Arneach is an accomplished storyteller who has told stories in a very wide variety of venues over the years that reach far beyond the traditional

context in which he learned his tales. While he still does make some performances in his home area, Arneach has become nationally-renowned as a Cherokee storyteller and has been sought out to perform at venues "throughout the United States" ("Lloyd Arneach"). His willingness to travel more widely has set him apart from other storytellers, such as Orville Hicks, who prefer to travel only closer to home. Arneach's flexibility in this way, however, has afforded him much greater opportunity in booking performances. He has told stories on a program for the Discovery Channel, at the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, at Northwestern University, and at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas ("Biography"; "Venues"). Some of Arneach's upcoming venues for late 2009 and early 2010 include the Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio; the Grout Museum District in Waterloo, Iowa; and the Wilderness Wildlife Week in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

All three of the storytellers featured in this study are included in the Southern Artistry Registry's online database of folk/traditional artists. Southern Artistry is "a multi-disciplinary showcase of outstanding Southern artists" ("Folk/Traditional"). This website provides links to each of the three tellers' websites and more information about booking a performance. Also, both Arneach and Regan-Blake have connections to professional artist representatives, while Hicks chooses to manage his bookings himself. Such representatives help storytellers to promote themselves to a wider audience and forge connections with interested venues. Arneach and Regan-Blake are willing to travel more widely, so having professional representatives helps them book jobs that are farther away

from their homes. Hicks, on the other hand, is a more local storyteller whose renown as a storyteller travels predominantly by word of mouth rather than with the help of a professional promoter.

Raising Public Awareness

One particular storytelling festival that has helped bring national and international attention to the traditional art of storytelling is the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, held annually in Washington, DC since 1967 ("Mission and History"). Each festival highlights certain aspects of folklife heritage from specific cultures both in the United States and abroad. One topic that has been regularly featured at the Folklife Festival is oral tradition or, more specifically, storytelling. In fact, Orville Hicks and Lloyd Arneach performed at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 2004. Appalachian storytellers have been featured at this festival and their performances have always received a positive reception in Washington. Orville Hicks and Lloyd Arneach were also both chosen by the North Carolina Arts Council as the only storytellers at the One North Carolina Festival that was held in conjunction with Governor Michael Easley's second inauguration in 2005. The North Carolina Arts Council recognized Hicks and Arneach as both representative of the range of North Carolina storytellers and also as truly authentic tradition bearers. Storytelling performances by Appalachian tellers at such a high-profile venue have helped to raise public awareness both about active storytelling culture in general and about the appeal of traditional mountain stories.

In order to book public performances at festivals, schools, or workshop engagements, many storytellers work through formal arts agencies to help them connect with interest parties. The North Carolina Arts Council and the Piedmont Council of Traditional Arts sponsored the One North Carolina Festival at which Orville Hicks and Lloyd Arneach performed. Such arts councils have established lists of artists who are active in the state or region they serve, and thus are ready to connect prospective venues or performance bookers with artists. Such arts agencies help traditional artists take the leap into public performance because they can help them understand the processes of booking, contracts, and payments. In this way, arts agencies and councils have played a vital role in helping traditional tellers (and revivalist, in the case of storytellers) secure jobs with school districts, corporations, or other people who may be interested in hiring a skilled storyteller.

The Legacy of Ray Hicks

The long-lasting influence of Jack Tale teller Ray Hicks continues to inspire the storytelling style and story selection of contemporary storytellers Orville Hicks and Connie Regan-Blake. Ray Hicks taught both his nephew Orville Hicks and storytelling mentee Regan-Blake many of his beloved Jack Tales over the course of many decades. While he acknowledged that modern forms of entertainment and changes in lifestyle could ultimately supersede the importance of the Jack Tales in Appalachian oral tradition, Ray also recognized the many intrinsic values and moral lessons that could be learned by the telling and listening to his beloved Jack Tales (McDermitt 7). For this reason, Ray

shared the stories with family members such as Orville, as well as interested outsiders like Regan-Blake, alike. Orville Hicks and Regan-Blake both acknowledge and pay homage to the substantial influence of Ray on their lives, and often talk about this formative relationship during their public storytelling events. In this way, the spirit of Ray Hicks continues to live in the storytelling of both Orville Hicks and Connie Regan-Blake.

New Performance Contexts Today

Although storytelling is still being upheld in its traditional oral contexts thanks to the legacies of such famed tellers as Ray Hicks, there are many newer contexts in which contemporary storytellers have chosen to promote their stories. All three of the storytellers included in this study have websites on which they include some sort of biographical information, photos of their performances, and information about ordering their audio recordings and books. Many modern storytellers, including all three of the tellers in this study, have recorded one or more compact discs that showcase some of their most popular or favorite stories. By maintaining creative license over the production of the audio recording, storytellers decide how both themselves and their stories will be conveyed to a mainstream audience. Some tellers choose to add short passages of spoken biographical information or music to better formulate their presentation of self for their audio recording audience. Illustrations and biographical information in books also add to the overall message and delivery for the storyteller. Storytellers recognize that selling their books and audio recordings on the internet and at

performance events widens the audience for their stories and gives them more exposure as performers. In addition to providing an additional source of income, audio recordings and books written by the storyteller spread the art of storytelling to a wider audience than can be reached by live performance alone.

The Persistence of Oral Tradition

The sustained performance of traditional stories in more public contexts by Lloyd Arneach and Orville Hicks has led to the special survival of authentic traditions for more mainstream audiences. The willingness of traditional artists like Arneach and Hicks to step beyond their traditional contexts of family and traditional community demonstrates their commitment to continuing the western North Carolina storytelling traditions of which they are a part. As a revivalist storyteller, Connie Regan-Blake is also committed to the continuation of Appalachian storytelling, but in different ways. Her close involvement with the National Storytelling Network over the years has given her opportunities to promote storytelling in a professional capacity, both through her own storytelling performances and through promoting other storytellers who have decided to take their art to public audiences. Regan-Blake is a revivalist in the best sense of the term because, while she fully acknowledges that she was not raised in a storytelling culture, she represents the most positive attributes of those cultures during her storytelling events in her presentation of self.

All three of these storytellers have been a special joy to meet and work with throughout the course of my research. They all brought unique insight and

discussion about their own storytelling to this project. This project would not have been possible had it not been for the cooperation of these three individuals, and I appreciate their cooperation, help, and generous sharing. It is my sincere hope that this study does justice to these three master storytellers.

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Vita

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